BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY: RIVALS AND ALLIES

NINIAN SMART

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Also by Ninian Smart

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SECULAR EDUCATION AND THE LOGIC OF RELIGION
THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS
WORLDVIEWS
THE YOGI AND THE DEVOTEE

Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies

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University of Hawaii Press
Honolulu

Published in North America by
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS
2840 Kolowalu Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

First published 1993 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Smart, Ninian, 1927–
Buddhism and Christianity: rivals and allies / Ninian Smart.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–8248–1519–X. — ISBN 0–8248–1520–3 (pbk.)
1. Buddhism—Relations—Christianity. 2. Christianity and other religions—Buddhism. 3. Religious pluralism. I. Title.
BR128.B8S59 1993
261.2'43—dc20 92–29475
CIP

Printed in Hong Kong

For Luisabel

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Preface

I am greatly indebted to Professor F.C.T. Moore of the Philosophy Department of the University of Hong Kong and to the Master of St John's College, Mr K.S. Leung, for the opportunity to visit Hong Kong during the fall of 1989 for the most part of the autumn semester, and to deliver the Martin Lectures of which this book is an outcome. I have written on a theme which should be important in Hong Kong – the world role of Buddhism and Christianity. In this I continue discussions started in my *Beyond Ideology*, arising from the Gifford Lectures of 1979–80. To the main text of the lectures I have appended that of my Louis Cha Lecture also delivered at Hong Kong University. It is most germane to the themes of the Martin Lectures, though it comes at them from a different angle.

The period I spent in Hong Kong was a sabbatical leave from the University of California, Santa Barbara. I am most grateful to that institution for the opportunity to pursue this project.

Also, 1989 was a memorable year, confirming some of my judgments.

University of Hong Kong: St John's College NINIAN SMART

1 Diverse Worldviews in Today's World

Perhaps there are four billion worldviews, since every person has her or his set of values and perspective on life. But there are also major patterns and systems which shape and are shaped by societies, and we give to these such labels as 'Christianity' and 'Buddhism'. They break down of course into varied incarnations, such as Roman Catholicism, the Theravada, Protestantism, Mahayana and so on, and more particularly into breeds such as Anglicanism, the Quakers, Hua-yen Buddhism, Zen and so forth. Blending with these varieties are national and regional variants: Sri Lankan Theravada, Scottish Presbyterianism, German Catholicism and so on. There are other blends too, where social and political diversities get conjoined to major traditions: liberal Protestantism, say in the United States; and socialistic Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Each hybrid in this luxuriant garden of the spirit commands its own loyalty. How do we get such plants to grow together, as the psychic surface of the globe shrinks, and every culture and every set of values is in interaction with all the others? I shall be addressing these matters in this small book.

There is more. I have listed above some of the great religious movements. But secular worldviews, such as Marxism, secular humanism, nationalism and so forth play (so to speak) in the same league as religion, often struggling against it, and sometimes beguilingly taking its hand. That is how we have the combinations I referred to above. But the bitter struggles between some modern ideologies and traditional religions match the more ancient internecine fighting of former times. The Khmer Rouge mowed down Buddhist monks and turned temples into granaries and barracks; Stalin persecuted Ukrainian Catholics and Russian Orthodox; nationalism in Italy came into conflict with the Church during the time of Garibaldi; and so on. Consequently, it makes sense to treat religious and non-religious worldviews together.[1]

There are in any case formal points of resemblance between a

secular worldview and a traditional religion. The way East German Marxists told the story of Germany is itself a kind of justificatory myth: the struggle of the Communists against Nazism gives the new country, liberated by the Soviet armies, a glorious background essentially untainted by the crimes and blood of Hitler and his gang. The nation had its doctrines: these are summed up in the thought of Marx and Lenin. It also had its ethical values – equality, justice for the workers, loyalty to the revolutionary ideal, etc. Its rituals were varied: marches and parades, listening to speeches, the use of special vocabulary and words such as 'comrade', the raising of the flag, the use of the symbolic colour red, and so forth. Its experiential side was inculcated through an education designed to induce feelings of pride and dedication. Its institutionalisation involved the cadres of the Communist Party. Its art and iconography were socialist realism and stirring portraits of heroes, etc. Whether we call it a religion or not is a matter of debate and choice: but it is an embodied worldview having some resemblances to more traditional worldviews.

What we have in the world is diverse worldviews living side by side, and sometimes in conflict. As the globe's psychic surface shrinks, the question of their deeper relationship becomes of greater moment. Can we devise a global ideology which will somehow embrace them all? Do all religions in principle point to the same truth? To what extent will differing values blend? Such questions will have practical meaning in regard to human cooperation and strife.

In looking to these questions I shall give great prominence to Buddhism and Christianity. They have helped to create the values which underlie Eastern and Western culture. Buddhism was and is a remarkably successful missionary faith, without being especially aggressive. It has permeated nearly all Asian countries: only the Philippines has been untouched by it. But not only this: it has played an especially creative role in the Chinese milieu. It has merged with a Taoist ambience in producing Ch'an Buddhism, and it has created a positive philosophy in Hua-yen. In T'ien-t'ai it has pioneered an embracing and synthetic approach. Moreover, its metaphysical subtlety inspired a great response in the form of Neo-Confucianism (*li-hsueh*, 理學). Its organisation and discipline helped to stimulate the monastic organisation of the Taoist tradition. In its interaction with the

other two great strands of Chinese religion it played a remarkable role in the full flowering of Chinese civilisation.

There is another reason why Buddhism is especially central for the student of religion and religions. Its shape challenges some important assumptions in Western approaches to, and theories about, religion. Because it has no, or mostly has no, God it undermines those who see theism as a unifying force in world religions. Because it centres more upon the mystical, inner life, and on the vital import of meditation and self-awareness, it challenges Rudolf Otto and those who think that the numinous experience of the awe-inspiring Other is the heart of religion. Because it does not put the Father at the core, it challenges the theories of Freud. Because it bases its ethic upon enlightenment and a special, vibrant vision of the world, rather than upon a supreme Lawgiver, it brings into question a frequent assumption of the West. Because it does not postulate an ultimate Substance or Absolute, it queries the unifying theories of Advaita Vedanta, Aldous Huxley and John Hick[2]. Because it has no soul (though it does preach rebirth), it challenges the ideas of R.C. Zaehner[3]. It eludes the world piety of Wilfred Cantwell Smith[4]. It is, especially in its Theravadin form, a great exception. It should thus be a mandatory study for students of religion; and it has other challenges besides, at the level of religion itself.

It is for these reasons and one other that I choose to explore the present global pluralism through the examples of Christianity and Buddhism. The last reason is that I love it: its messages entrance me. I sometimes count myself a Buddhist Episcopalian, when I am not worrying too much about contradictions.

Though Islam is also a highly successful and significant world faith, I choose to debate the approaches to Christianity to some of the themes I shall handle: partly because Christianity remains so seminal to Western spirituality and thinking about the world; partly because it provides a good counterbalance to Buddhism; partly because I love my own tradition as part of a wider Christian heritage; and partly because in permeating Western society it swims in the same river as scientific enterprise and liberal politics – both of which are vital in the modern and future world. But though I take forms of Christianity and Buddhism as central to the dialogue of religions and worldviews, the discussion is in the wider setting of global civilisation, with its variegations of values and important tensions.

It is in this context that the modern study of religions finds so much of its value and impact. It is the task of the student of religions to unfold their meaning and history. First, it is vital that we should understand religions in a deep way, that is by entering into the standpoint and feelings of those who believe them. In approaching a religious or ideological system which is not one's own it is vital not merely to be informed, but to have the empathy and imagination to know something of what the values of the system feel like from the 'inside'. Such empathy is in my view a vital component of education often neglected. Even at the most basic level it has its important uses. For a boy to know what it is like to be a girl, or for a tall man to know what it is like to be a short man, imagination is needed. How much more so when we are dealing with whole webs of meaning, as in a deep cultural context and in relation to religious and ethical beliefs.

Moreover, the information which we need in order to understand a religious tradition (or perhaps I should say in order to understand *better* and *more adequately* – for understanding is not an all or nothing matter but rather a matter of degree) should be balanced. It is a common complaint that too many histories of Christianity concern almost exclusively the doctrinal and organisational evolution of the Church. Much of the life of Christians – for instance, their worship and meditation and praying – may be left out. For this reason I have laid out in various works the schema of the dimensions of religion: it is a kind of menu indicating the various aspects of a religion or ideology that ought to be covered if we wish to paint a balanced picture. In *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1969) I listed six dimensions; in the more recent *The World's Religions* (1989) I added another, to make seven. I do not claim that this is the only schema that could be adopted, but some such schema is useful.

The seven dimensions are as follows. First (though not necessarily foremost since different movements weight each dimension differently: Quakers for instance do not do so much with the ritual and doctrinal dimensions, but much more with the ethical and experiential), there is the ritual or practical dimension: the modes in which a religion can express itself through forms of worship, or methods of meditation, or pilgrimages, or ascetic practices and so on. Second, there is the experiential or emotional dimension: the ways in which saints have felt enlightenment or conversion and in which folk have apprehended awe and fear and love and

so on. Third, there is the doctrinal or philosophical dimension: ways in which a religion expresses its teachings and reflections about reality – for instance, there is the Trinity doctrine in Christianity and the Madhyamika philosophy in Buddhism. Fourth, there is the ethical dimension, namely the moral values of the system. Fifth, there is the narrative or mythic dimension – the stories about the past and future, about the divine in interaction with humans, and so forth. Such stories as are found in the great epics of Hinduism and the collections of myths, or in the Bible, or concerning the life of the Buddha and his previous lives, etc. Sixth, there is the social or organisation dimension – the way a religion is institutionalised through the Church or the Sangha (Order of Monks and Nuns), through its implication in social structures, and so on. Seventh, there is the material or artistic dimension: how a religion manifests itself in buildings, ritual implements, statues, books, tombs and so on – such as the *stūpas* and pagodas of Buddhism and the chapels and cathedrals of Christianity.

You can catch a lot of the spirit of a religion from the material dimension. The austerity and plainness of traditional Welsh nonconformism can be read in its chapels: the worldly triumphalism and soaring sentiments of transcendence can be soaked up from the stones and buttresses of the great medieval cathedrals. The serenity and gentle attractions of traditional Buddhism can be gleaned from the white temples of Sri Lanka, and the ideal of Buddhahood shines through so many Buddha-statues across the Eastern world.

As noted earlier, different religious movements may lay differing weights on the various dimensions. For Zen Buddhists a great deal hangs on the experiential dimension, and less on the doctrinal. For almost all Christians, great value is attached to the narrative dimension – the story of Israel and Christ as brought out in the Old and New Testaments. For Judaism the ethical and ritual dimensions are of central concern, for they are embodied in the Torah.

As I have already indicated, this schema helps to provide a fairly broad-based menu for arranging information about a religious tradition. Anything which displays all or most of the dimensions is a candidate for being called a religion. Those who think that a religion has to have some belief in God might think of the Theravada as not falling into this category, for the gods

there are of merely secondary and evanescent importance, while strictly speaking there is no worship of the Buddha, who in his final nirvana has disappeared and become as it were a puff of air and an elusive light, gone and ineffable, the *Tathāgata*, or 'Thus-gone'. After Gertrude Stein had revisited her native Oakland she was asked on her return to New York how it was there, and she replied that there was no 'there' there – and so we may say that in the case of the Buddha there is no person there. But for those who for this and other reasons may be sceptical as to whether the Theravada is a religion, I reply that it does display the various dimensions: it has plenty of philosophy and doctrine; plenty of ritual; quite a lot of myth; and defined set of ethical precepts; a deeply entrenched organisational structure; much emphasis on the experiential dimension (surrounded as it were by the practical path of meditation and self-awareness); and a good display of spiritual art and architecture. These characteristics are enough to make comparisons with theistic religions important. In some ways the problem of a word can be passed by: the realities of Christianity and Buddhism can be compared and explored together, because their dimensional analogies merit investigation. Above all there is the question of whether Christian mysticism (that is, the contemplative life) is similar or not to that found in Buddhism. The net result of my method is that there is a multifaceted family resemblance between religions, and this means in turn that we cannot easily rule out non-religious ideologies from the comparative study of religions.

Since English is not rich in its vocabulary of terms about beliefs and values, it is hard to find a good word which covers both religions and ideologies, and the best I can do is to use the term 'worldview' for the genus of which religious and non-religious systems are species. So Nazism, for instance, would count as a non-religious worldview – though according to my argument it has many analogies to a religion, and had the word 'religion' not become rather restricted in its scope might reasonably be called a religion – as too with Maoism, the varieties of nationalism and even scientific humanism. But since some of the adherents of these ideologies would not thank you for calling them religions, it is probably best to be conservative in our use of the term. Those systems which are conventionally and traditionally called religions would, then, be *one* species of worldview; and the rest would be called 'non-religious worldviews'.

The word is a bit cerebral, but I want, for the sake of balance, to keep reminding us that it is *incarnated* worldviews which we shall be considering. In the case of Nazism, for instance, it is not just a matter of belief in the racial doctrines and the various myths of history lying behind it, and the strange system of ethics that it subscribed to, but the worldview as incarnated in the Nazi Party, the rituals of salutes, parades, rallies, hymn-singing and so on, the emotions of intense German patriotism and conversion-experiences of the faithful, and the material manifestations in swastika signs and distinctive uniforms, grandiose buildings and military hardware. I partly use the example of Nazism to underline the point that we should not take a romantic view of worldviews and religions. It is easy to think of religions in particular as 'good'. Like other human phenomena they are a mixture and they vary. In the comparative study of religions or what more broadly may be called Worldview Analysis, we are first of all concerned to bring out what the worldviews of the world are like, and to delineate them in a balanced and a sensitive way. Only when we understand them better will it be time to reflect about them and to try to evaluate them.

But even before we have gone too deeply into them, one or two conclusions about the worldviews of today's world are fairly clear. Despite the theories of such important writers as Swami Vivekananda, Rudolf Otto, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hick, it is difficult to think of religions as containing a deep unity of reference or of experience. Or let us put it this way: even if there is a 'perennial philosophy' (to use a phrase of Aldous Huxley) running through the great religions, many adherents of those religions will not perceive it. And if they believe that their worldview is in contradiction with others, then it is so, importantly. For what is a worldview but the set of values and dimensions of those who are committed to it? (So as it turns out, a religion breaks into sub-religions; and it may be that down this slippery slope we end up again with the four billion worldviews with which we began.)

Now, since worldviews define very different outlooks, it is clear that beginning from one's own worldview one will not be able to prove, to adherents of another worldview, the truth of one's own worldview. The Christian cannot cite the Bible to the Buddhist without being drawn into a dialogue on what the Buddhist disputes – the ideas of God, of revelation, of history's special

place for Israel and the early Church, and so on. Given that someone accepts your premises you may be able to 'prove' your worldview: but generally speaking the other person has to accept your worldview before he or she will be comfortable with your premises.

Moreover, history indicates that worldviews do not get disproved, but, if anything, like old soldiers they fade away – perhaps because they slowly lose plausibility, or relevance; or because their institutional base is destroyed; or both. And so in this new global world whose psychic surface has so shrunk, when each worldview is in interaction with the rest, we shall continue to have rival worldviews cheek by jowl. Moreover, the angst engendered by the feeling of uncertainty created by this situation will spark off backlashes, such as varieties of what is often called fundamentalism (whether Muslim, or Christian, or Jewish, or Hindu, and so on). Even the secular ideologies are affected to some degree by anxiety, and so it is that in the glasnost of Gorbachev's Soviet Union there is a 'conservative' Marxist-Leninist reaction to the (relatively) new liberalism.

Of course, even if you cannot have proof, you can have reasons, but these will be rather soft.[5] For instance, Muslims, in backing the claim that the Qur'ān is the word of God, cite its wondrous poetic power, the fact that Muhammad was largely illiterate (so how could he have composed such a marvellous book?), and the story of his religious experiences and fabulous success against great odds. But though these are reasons for saying that the Qur'ān is revelation from God they are not proofs. Could not Muhammad have been a kind of Mozart of the spirit, and created the texts from his deep unconscious? So reasons are soft in this area, especially because very often counter-evidence to a religious or ideological system is greeted with some changes in the system – for instance liberal Protestantism readily grants that the cosmology of the authors of the Bible is simply outdated. Briefly, then, there is an important degree of public uncertainty attaching to all worldviews.

This does not mean that individuals may not have certitude, or faith. The correlative of faith is, after all, doubt. Perhaps Thomas should be our patron saint. Also, our 'principle of uncertainty' does not mean that there are not fragments of worldviews which we might all – or virtually all – be agreed on. There are elements of the scientific view of the world which

Muslims, Christians, Marxists and Buddhists may incorporate into their outlooks. The theory that the earth goes round the sun is something which such differing worldviews may concur in. The fact is that worldviews are like collages – arranging elements, some of them common as between worldviews, in complex patterns. But, viewed as wholes, worldviews are subject to public uncertainty, and are in effect unprovable, even though they may command warm loyalty and a kind of subjective certitude from those who hold them. Doubt is the public face of personal faith. Because of this it would seem that worldviews ought to tolerate one another, since without public certitude who has the right to lay down that one worldview is the truth and that others ought to be suppressed?

I am not advocating relativism here. I am only arguing that the reasons for holding a worldview are, viewed from outside, soft ones. What I advocate may rather negatively be called a *soft non-relativism*. This raises some philosophical questions which need to be dealt with, and which I shall address towards the end of the book – such questions as to how far we should tolerate the intolerant.

Against this general background of approach, my voyage into the subject-matter will be as follows. First, I shall look into the contrasts of assumption and detail in the two religious movements known broadly as Christianity and Buddhism. Here the comparisons will sound through the various dimensions which I have listed. In particular, the Theravada challenges most sacramental forms of Christian worship. But I shall also sketch some of the differences between Mahayana and the Christian tradition, even though there are also some convergences, to which I shall allude. Since throughout the varied kinds of Buddhism meditation remains important, it is worth considering in some depth whether it has, in the Buddhist context, a similarity to Christian contemplation, as in some of the great mystical writings of the West. What would Hui Neng have thought of Teresa of Avila? What would Buddhaghosa have said about Eckhart? What would the arhats of old Ceylon have made of John of the Cross? And what would such Christian mystics have thought about the saintly followers of the Enlightened One? These are vital questions – for there are those who are inclined to think that mysticism is everywhere the same. The divergences of language are due to the cultural and spiritual milieu, clothing

the dazzling darkness and unspeakable light in differing doctrinal clothes. But is it so? The late Professor R.C. Zaehner was among those who were inclined the other way, and to think that the differences of religious opinions reached by diverse mystics arose because some had a non-personal experience and others the immersion in divine Love. Between what he called the monistic form of mysticism and the more personal kind there was a gap: small but highly significant. Some were in dazzling darkness and merged in the cloud of unknowing: while the others were in an obscurity which yet revealed a relationship, a light and living duality between God and the individual soul. A lot hangs on these questions, of whether after all Zaehner is right, or whether others such as Aldous Huxley are nearer the truth, and whether we can find out?

From here I move on, in this small voyage, to a vital intellectual achievement of Chinese Buddhism: the formulation of Hua-yen Buddhism in a positive and at the same time rather Taoist way. This delineates the principle of the interdependency of events, so vital to all forms of Buddhism, in an affirmative form, rather than that negative manner commonly taken up in the Indian schools. The universe is likened to the wondrous jewel-net of Indra in which each stone, strung together in the net, gleamingly reflects every other. Every event in the cosmos reflects every other. There are interesting relations between this model and some of the deliverances of modern science. It is indeed an interesting problem as to why modern science came out of the West, which was dominated by Aristotle and the Bible, both containing some strong hindrances to modern cosmology. On the other hand, Buddhism's idea that the cosmos is composed of a vast swarm of short-lived events and its myth of the vast scope of the universe both chime in well with modern scientific conclusions. I shall pause to consider some modern Christian relations to science. Intellectual and social problems of great magnitude arise here – for instance how we related modern critical enquiry to the affirmation of traditional values. Can one be both a follower of Christ and of Karl Popper? It is to the credit both of Christianity and Buddhism that each has evolved its own form of self-criticism.

From here I move on, in a sense, to politics. In traditional China the 'three-traditions system' was worked out, and implied a form of symbiosis between Confucianism, Buddhism and Tao-

ism. This may have much to teach us in the new global pluralism. Can it become a fourfold system, with Marxism as the fourth (not to mention a sixfold system if we count in Christianity and Islam)?

From here I move on to a deeper appreciation of the possibilities of Buddhist-Christian interaction. In particular I suggest that the relation between the two faiths should be viewed as that of complementarity, with each, in a benevolent way, able to fill gaps in the other, and each stimulating the other by true living criticism. The ultimate questions of truth will be touched on, since it will be important to see ways of evaluating types of religious experience and the weights put upon differing aspects of human life in the two traditions. This will introduce a more general discussion of the future of the religions and ideologies in the new global milieu and the new human civilisation that we see forming.

In conclusion I argue for a higher-order agreement between the worldviews of the world to pursue their different value-systems in a peaceful manner. The future will, or should, be determined by persuasion, not by the gun. The ideologies and religions will have an important function as critics of the world order. Buddhism and Christianity in particular should be able to call on their diverse glimpses of the Transcendent to call into question the trivial and greedy appetites that give our economic system a bad name. They may also be among those striving towards a noble vision of the future, when, in a single and small world, the dark forces of tyranny may be more menacing, and when technology may be the handmaid of surveillance and regimentation.

2 Contrasts and Comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity

As I have already indicated, there are both spiritual and theoretical reasons to take seriously the unique challenge which Buddhism, above all in its Theravadin form, presents to Western theism. Whether you are Christian or Jewish or Muslim you will root your faith in a creator God: but such a conception is rejected in early Buddhism. If there are aspects of the Great Vehicle which steer Buddhism towards devotional piety, reliance on a celestial grace and belief in heavenly reward, that is because of the great flexibility of the Buddha's tradition. But it should not hide the conceptual austerity of that kind of Buddhism which is still found and which in some degree still flourishes in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The Theravada had some impact in China, though it was the Great Vehicle which was most formative there. I begin with it in order to bring out some of the challenges and divergences which Buddhism represents. I shall look at the face-off through the prism of my seven dimensions.

To begin with, the narrative or mythic flavour of the two religions is astonishingly divergent. The very lives of the great heroes and saviours, of the Buddha and Christ, are so different. The earthly career of the one was so brief and turbulent, ending in a criminal's death on the Cross and the subsequent brilliant light of the Resurrection. The Buddha left his home around the age of thirty, and after a few years of learning, austerity, meditation and thought reached a supreme insight under the Bodhi tree: subsequently he had forty-five years or so of moving round the cities and villages of northern India, until he died of a digestive complaint at the age of eighty. The one's life is storm, humiliation and triumph; the other's is disturbance, withdrawal,

huge insight and active serenity. Both used parables and images, but Jesus' were often shot through with mystery and intimations of the God behind. The Buddha's similes were instructional in purpose, and his teachings were built on a highly analytic scaffolding. Moreover, the logic of salvation wrought by the two central figures differs. Jesus saved humanity through his deeds and death – he was a sacrifice which restored the breach between human beings and the Divine, and the way of the Cross, however unlooked for, was nevertheless the path that the salvific plan of action took. The Buddha saves through his teaching above all. Of course he had to come down from a heaven to be reborn in this world, but the heart of liberation lies in the Eightfold Path which he laid down and which rests on the teachings which issued forth from the meticulous light of his Bodhi. There were, by the way, other Buddhas referred to in the scriptures who were called in Pali *pacceka-buddhas*, who saw the truth but could not teach it (I call them 'research Buddhas'!). Gautama was one who could convey the liberating message. Jesus did teach, of course: but his teachings have usually been reckoned as secondary to his deeds. In brief, the careers of the two central figures have a very different taste and shape.

Moving to the material dimension, we see of course this diversity of shape in sculptured and artistic form in the two religions. The Buddha is seen as a serene yogi, with possibly the hint of a flicker of a smile upon his lips, as in some of the sculptures in the museum at Sarnath outside of Banaras, where he delivered his first discourse to his erstwhile companions in the search for ultimate truth. The expression on the Buddha's face – at least at this stage in the evolution of the image – is somewhere strangely between the solemn and the cheerful. But in Eastern Orthodoxy the most famous form of Christ is highly numinous – the Pantokrator or ruler of the cosmos, whose haunting eyes and majesty of brow instinctively bring you to bow your head. Or the figure of Christ may be, for us, summed up in the Catholic crucifix – we picture Jesus hanging, tortured on the Cross. The nearest to this in the case of the Buddha is where he is depicted as sitting after a long period of severe self-mortification. His ribs are spelled out in detail, the musculature and the collarbones, the skull, the shrunken arms, everywhere the major veins. It is an episode which indicates the Buddha's heroism, though he found such asceticism counter-productive. But though it is a

grim view of the Buddha, it has such a different meaning from the poor body hanging on the Cross that it scarcely represents a convergence. For the most part the Buddha is serene and not badly fed, indicating fearlessness, with his hand gestures, or the analytic character of his teaching, or the need for the earth to witness to his enlightenment.

The character of the great buildings of the two faiths differs too. In the Theravada there is a configuration of edifices – the *stūpa* containing a relic, solid, gleaming white, to be walked around; the preaching hall; the monks' quarters; the image rooms, with great statues of the Buddha; the bo tree, hanging with flags; the small shrine for some god or other. A Buddhist temple does not have the soaring focus of the cathedral or the mysterious golden light behind screens of the heavenly Orthodox church. It does not have the focus on altar and sacrament; nor does it have the Reformed focus on the pulpit as where the sacrament of the Word is mediated. It is true that later Mahayana shrines, especially where there is emphasis on tantric rituals – that is sacramental rituals which mediate buddhahood – have more analogy to their Christian counterparts. But the numinous focus of the cathedral is not quite there in the Theravada.

In early Buddhism the Buddha, by the way, was absent. His marks and companions were in the bas-relief scenes, but the Buddha himself was not portrayed. Scholars differ over the meaning of this. Perhaps it indicates that after his final decease it is not correct to say that he exists, or that he does not, nor that he both does and does not, nor that he neither does and does not. This comprehensive negation is no doubt intended to show that the question of where the Buddha is after his decease is wrongly put, meaningless. But religiously it indicates that the Buddha is not there to be worshipped or communicated with. This is very unlike the early Christian scene, where Jesus' resurrection was taken to indicate that he lives. Christ is risen, was the Easter cry. Early pictures of Jesus testify to a sense of his living presence. It was, in a sense, an embarrassment, for Christ's living presence in the central rite of the Church, the eucharist, testified to his divinity, and his divinity posed tricky questions (to say the least) to those who were upholders too of Jewish monotheism. Hence there came about in due course the Trinity doctrine, which I will deal with later. So in the case of the Buddha he was absent

(positively absent, no doubt, somewhat in the style of Jean-Paul Sartre's example: when you go to a cafe to meet Pierre and he is not there[1]*).* But Christ is positively present. The ultimate meaning of this is that in the Theravada the Buddha is not worshipped, and in Christianity Christ is. This leads us on to think about the practical or ritual dimension.

The essence of ritual practice in the theistic religions is worship. Worship involves such things as hymns, prayers and adoration. But it is strictly inappropriate to talk of the worship of the Buddha, in the Theravadin context. It is true that, under medieval Mahayana influence, the Theravada has developed majestic Buddha images, whose huge size is taken as symbolic of the vast spiritual stature of the Buddha. People lay offerings of flowers before such images. Such an act is meritorious, and brings the possibility of a better time in lives to come. It is reverential, and memorial, for it harks back to the saving teaching of the Buddha. But, as I say, strictly it is not worship. Later, in the Great Vehicle, there are such celestial Buddhas as Amitabha who are indeed worshipped, for they function like gods. But in the Theravada the fact is – as I have emphasised – that the Buddha has disappeared, gone out like a flame, his individual personhood dispersed like a puff of air.

Not only this: much of Christianity also focuses upon the sacramental participation of the faithful in the life of Christ, through the Eucharist. This is far removed from the atmosphere of the Theravada. For one thing the imagery of sacrifice does not chime in with Theravadin sentiment. Buddhism opposed animal sacrifices, and also the whole apparatus of the religion of the Brahmins. It gave a moral interpretation of the role of the Brahmin: the true Brahmin is someone who exercises self-restraint and lives up to peaceable moral ideals. It was against the idea of special experts in ritual, and indeed most ritual itself was given pragmatic value as psychologically useful. For instance the offering of a flower is not a sacrifice, but a concrete way of expressing appreciation for the liberating work of the Teacher.

The Eightfold Path indicates quite clearly what the practical dimension of Buddhism was to concentrate upon: above all *sati* and *samādhi*, that is self-awareness and deep meditation. Though in later times the contemplative life may have faded here and there, it was supposed to be the chief focus of the life of monks

and nuns. The Sangha or Order was to be the core organisation which nurtured in its midst the life of self-awareness and inner searching. It was the setting for the mystical existence, where the individual becomes a virtuoso of the inward ascent, through the *jhānas* or stages of meditation, to the absolute purification of consciousness. This is not itself nirvana, but it is the chief method along the way.

Such an emphasis on the contemplative was not too long in making its appearance in Christianity, largely through the institution of Christian monasticism. Especially after the faith had conquered the Roman Empire, when it could be fashionable to be a Christian and so a shallow avocation, monasticism offered the rigorous life of self-sacrifice which the voice of Christ summoned men and women to. The martyr was replaced by the monk. Moreover, Christian motifs, drawn both from the Jewish tradition and more recent Christian ones, merged with the philosophy and ethos of Neoplatonism, itself a mystical religion. All this brought the Christian tradition closer in spirit to Buddhism. But Christian contemplation was always bathed in the flavour of worship and of the Eucharist. Conversely Buddhism, where it did gain the practices of worship and sacramental ritual, was still bathed in the flavour of the contemplative life. The Theravada itself was the contemplative life without God.

Let us now turn to the doctrinal or philosophical dimension. This is of considerable importance in both religions, but for diverse reasons. In the case of Buddhism, the analytical truths about the world help to paint a picture of reality which can be deepened by the contemplative life which it encourages. Doctrine and experience are supposed to go hand in hand. These reasons for having doctrines are not absent in the case of the Christian faith: but something more fundamental drove the Church to the formulation of doctrines. It was to help to define the faith of the new Israel. The old Israel was defined by descent, by the heredity of those who belonged to the Jewish people. There were, it is true, those who affiliated by conversion. But there was a core of heredity to the old Israel. With the New, the core had to be seen in terms of the faithful: but growing divisions in the interpretation of the Gospel led to the need to draw bounds – first, to establish a Canon of scripture; and then to express as definitively as possible the doctrines of the faith.

Buddhist teachings can be approached in differing ways. Let

us start with the three marks of existence, as they are called: everything is impermanent, without permanent soul or self, and characterised by suffering. The fundamental one of these three is impermanence, for from it the others flow – no soul, because nothing is permanent; suffering, because even joys do not last. Because of the idea that all is impermanent the cosmos is seen as a huge flux of transitory events. What are in ordinary thought considered to be substances or things are found on deeper examination to be bundles of events. By contrast, the Greek thought which the Church drew on so heavily in the formulation of its key doctrines was drenched in the concept of *ousia* or substance. With Aristotle in the background, the whole of subsequent Western thought has been obsessed with substance, from ancient Greece to Immanuel Kant's things-in-themselves, and from Descartes to Strawson. It was not for nothing that classical Catholic teaching about the Mass was framed in terms of *transubstantiation*.

According to Buddhism there was a kind of emptiness at the heart of events: nothing had its own being, but was dependent on, and relative to, other events. Moreover there was an emptiness at the heart of the individual, who is put together out of various *khandhas* or groups of events – bodily events, sensations, feelings, impulses or dispositions, and states of consciousness. The person should be able to analyse himself in these terms, and see that there is nothing permanent there. And so there is no soul. This again is rather different from the main emphasis in the Christian tradition.

Further, Buddhism, despite this repudiation of the idea of a permanent soul, holds to belief in rebirth or reincarnation. In this it differs from the Christian tradition, which had mostly rejected the notion, in favour of belief in resurrection of the body and in a soul (it was not always easy to hold the two doctrines together). Buddhists, in holding that, if one dies without stilling the voices of passion and gaining the light of insight, one is reborn, have a great gallery of possibilities to play with. You can reappear in a heaven for millions of years until you have exhausted your merit, and you then come down to earth again. Or you can go to a terrible purgatory and suffer millions of years, until again you have worked off your demerit. You can be reborn as an animal, as a ghost, as a god, as a human. The last is best of all because it is only as a human that you can gain ultimate

liberation or nirvana. Then there is no more rebirth. You see the immortal place, you gain the light, and yet the 'you' of you is lost. In losing individuality you gain release from rebirth. This is not like the full flowering of your gleaming personality which suffuses life with God in heaven.

Empty impermanence and a flux of events, empty personhood through a combination of bundles of events, rebirth and non-individual liberation: these are very different ideas from those which have run through mainstream Christian thought. Patterning them all is the so-called law of dependent origination in which it is held that all events are brought about through other events. Eventually everything traces back, from the point of view of analysis, to ignorance. That is at the basis of the grasping which makes individuals cling to the world. In nirvana the cosmos disappears, though others may carry on.

Such ideas were later developed in a very sophisticated way, through the dialectics of Nāgārjuna and such Chinese systems as Ch'ān and Hua-yen. Perhaps the dominant note is that of ultimate emptiness. Though for ordinary purposes we use language, underlying it are various contradictory notions, such as substance and causation. Ultimately or transcendently, you can only point to the truth, which is variously called the Empty or Suchness. The Buddha is the Tathāgata or Thus-gone, whose very nature is Suchness. He is like a bird, trackless in the sky.

This vision of an impermanent world made up of vast clusters of events is something no doubt that owed itself to the analytic powers of the Buddha's own intellect. But perhaps he also saw that mystical experience did not demand some all-embracing Absolute but rather a minimally described state of transcendence. Certainly nirvana is characterised more by what it is not than by what it is. So in regard to the experiential dimension we can say that primarily we have to deal with inner 'vision'. Buddhism – at least Theravada Buddhism – is not drenched in the awe-inspiring and the numinous. Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) presents the numinous as the central experience of religions, something which reveals a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a mystery to be trembled at, which is fascinating. But when he comes to the Theravada he falters somewhat: it is fascinating all right, but it does not make much sense to say that it is an awe-inspiring mystery. On the other hand, the experiences of Isaiah in the Temple, of Job when confronted by God speaking

out of a whirlwind, of Paul on the Damascus Road, all have a profoundly numinous quality.

I did not mention earlier that Buddhism does not deny the gods. They are secondary powers inhabiting the cosmos at various levels. There are a virtually infinite number of world-systems, by the way (the Buddhist cosmos was always immense and imparted its pulsating vastness to the Hindus). Each world-system has its own Brahmā and Māra, a presiding god and the Buddhist Satan, whose name means literally the deathmaker. For as long as you are under the spell of the evil one you will die and die and die again (rebirth is after all just a more optimistic name for the process of redeath). Incidentally, the scale of the universe contrasts with the very narrow conception of the cosmos contained in the Biblical sources. It was a struggle for the West to wriggle out of the pre-Copernican straitjacket, and it is virtually only in this century that we have become aware of the immense scale of the universe we live in. No wonder the apologists for Buddhism smile somewhat in the age of science.

Although, as I have said, the Buddhist texts admit the gods, even the great god Brahmā, the creator god of the Brahmin tradition, they do treat him with much irony.[2] Because at the start of a new cycle of existence, when the cosmos is, so to speak, awaking from its slumbers, Brahmā is the first being to emerge, he is wrongly disposed to think that everything which came after him arose because of him. He is deluded into thinking he is the creator. Like all other beings he is the product of previous conditions. This is an ironical way to treat the great god. Gods in general can give you worldly blessings, but do nothing to advance you on the spiritual path. So a student who wants to pass an examination may offer a coconut at the shrine of Vishnu which huddles near the entrance to a Buddhist temple; but for spiritual merit and true advancement he has to reflect about the Buddha and the Eightfold Path. He must advance more deeply into the temple complex and touch base with the great Teacher and his monastic successors.

Note, by the way, how Buddhism does not attempt to tackle alternative religions head-on. Rather it prefers to tame them, by accepting some of the forms and then emptying them. They make eunuchs of the Hindu gods. The idea of rebirth helps to make their educational theory more relaxed. People can be seduced gradually into the true path.

In these five dimensions there are, then, plenty of contrasts. In the remaining two, namely the ethical and the organisational, there are perhaps less. Buddhist ethics contains five precepts, four of which are overlapping with Biblical injunctions, while the fifth is not at all alien to the Christian tradition. The five precepts ban killing, taking what is not given, wrong use of speech, wrong sex and taking intoxicants. They are framed more widely than Western commandments, so that wrong use of speech includes not just lying, but also frivolous and malicious talk. The ban on intoxicants has to do with the fact that alcohol and drugs cause delusion and unclarity of mind, which is hostile to the achievement of self-awareness and ultimate purification of consciousness. Because of belief in rebirth and for other reasons, the ban on killing is strictly taken to mean that one should not kill animals and other living beings, though this injunction is realised in a rather relaxed manner in most Buddhist societies. Behind all this lie the great virtues – benevolence, joy in others' joy, compassion and equanimity. Compassion is usually thought of as the central Buddhist virtue, and it has a different flavour from the idea of *agapē* or Christian love. But while there are strong contrasts in other dimensions, the ethical conclusions of the two systems are not very far apart. This is one reason why I believe in the possible complementarity of the two faiths.

As for social organisation, Buddhism is in theory, like Christianity, opposed to the caste system. The Order of monks and nuns, and close lay disciples both male and female, has its analogue in Christian monasticism in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions. This of course was something rejected by the Protestant reformers, so to this extent there is a contrast between Protestantism and Buddhism, though it may be noted that some later Buddhist saints, notably Shinran, also rejected the monastic impulse as incompatible with the simple reliance on faith which in latter sinful days was the appropriate response of the Buddhist. Though seniority is important within the Order, the constitution was nevertheless modelled on the relatively democratic republican orders of certain north Indian nations during the period of the Buddha himself.

In all this I have sketched some of the major contrasts between Theravada Buddhism and Western theism. There are contrasts also with what was to become the Hindu tradition of India (also in its own way mainly theistic). Because of these

contrasts, challenges are presented to various Western theories. I have already mentioned Rudolf Otto's work. His thesis about the numinous is stimulating and illuminating, but it does not in my view cover all the major movements and patterns in religion, as the case of the Theravada shows (we might also cite Ch'ān Buddhism and Jainism). Similarly Schleiermacher's earlier thesis of the centrality of the feeling of absolute dependence seems to rely for its plausibility on the Western theistic cultural milieu in which he was raised. More recently, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's influential writings see religion as involving an expression of faith and, by implication, faith in a personal Being, which again runs counter to Theravadin assumptions. His treatment of world religions is often most fruitful, but in this particular it seems his eirenic impulse has been carried too far. Because Buddhism so often and so basically rejects substance it is not easy to fit it into John Hick's schema of the one noumenal Reality of which the various religious presentations and experiences are so many phenomena. Nor does the Theravada fit the schema (more pluralistic it is true) of R.C. Zaehner in his *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (1951). It undermines the assumptions of universalistic mystics, Sufi-influenced, such as René Guenon[3] and Hoseyn Nasr.[4] Nor does it fit with the neo-Vedanta (actually neo-Advaita) thesis of Swami Vivekananda, while the closely related unifying philosophy of Radhakrishnan has difficulty fitting Buddhism into the substantialist Vedantin outlook. Aldous Huxley, belonging to the same neo-Hindu circle, has equal problems.

One thing you can say here of course is that the Buddha was really pointing to an Absolute like Brahman, or really pointing to Allah, except that he chose to emphasise the *via negativa*. I do not deny that from our point of view if we wish to we may argue that there is a God or Absolute and the Buddha was in touch with that. But it does not describe the Buddha's position. Further, even if it did and so most of his followers (perhaps virtually all of them) misunderstood him, this does not do much to advance the thesis, since it is the living religion of the followers we have to deal with. Similarly neo-Advaitins sometimes quote the text 'I and the Father are one' as a Christian version of the famous *Tat tvam asi* and other identity texts in the Upanishads. They go on to argue that Christ was really an Advaitin. Maybe so, but since most of the Church and virtually all Christians have rejected

Advaita-style doctrines, it does not help much with the reconciliation of the living realities of the diverse traditions.

All this means that it is very vital for students of religion and anyone interested in modern approaches to the study of worldviews to have some immersion in the Theravada. It is the great critical challenge to most Western theories about religion. (By the way, it seems to sap at the very fabric of Freudian theory, and even Jung, who loved to voyage East, looks seasick in the waters of Southeast Asia.) Since I like diversity and since I realise that theorists do not have an easy life, I rejoice in the particularity of the Theravada.

But from a bit before the beginning of the Common Era there were developing other forms of Buddhism. As the Theravadin tradition was congealing into the Pali Canon, Sanskrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts were emerging which gave a very different slant on the teachings. Later in China, Korea and Japan some of these slants were to have considerable extension, as we shall see. I shall devote the last part of this chapter to sketching some of the ways in which Mahayana developments came to converge somewhat with Christian and other kinds of theism. Buddhism is nothing if not diverse. Some Westerners confronted with this shake their heads in disbelief. But the Buddha seems to have given the signal for possible changes by his teaching of the need to adapt teachings to the psychological and cultural conditions of the hearers. This is why he wanted Buddhist teaching conveyed in vernacular languages, not in the semi-private learned language of the Brahmins, namely Sanskrit. The increased Sanskritisation of Buddhist texts did not bode well for the future, but Buddhism was refreshed by the need to translate its messages into Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

The most important transformation of the mythic dimension was the emergence in the Great Vehicle of the idea of the Bodhisattva or Buddha-to-be, of – that is to say – a being who is destined for Buddhahood, but decides to put off his own enlightenment and final release in order to work for the welfare of other living beings. He is unhappy so long as others are unhappy. Since *ex hypothesi* he has gained a vast store of merit which is sufficient to bring him enlightenment, and since he goes on through many lives to sacrifice himself to help others, he accumulates even more merit. Out of this great treasury he can distribute merit to the otherwise unworthy faithful, helping them

even further along the path. There are of course analogies here to the notion of Christ's treasury of grace and to the self-sacrifice of Christ himself. Many Buddhists look upon Jesus as a Bodhisattva. The great Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is a good example of one who comes to occupy a status like that of a God. In China he changed sex, and became Kuanyin, a figure quite like that of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Similarly there emerged celestial Buddhas, especially Amitābha, who created the Pure Land to the West as a paradise where the faithful are transported on death for rebirth in delicious circumstances where the prospect of final liberation is close. Here heaven comes to displace nirvana in popular imagination. Again the notion of grace becomes important since the great teachers of the Pure Land tradition came more and more to stress that the faithful only need to call on the name of Amitābha sincerely and they will gain these great blessings. St Francis Xavier complained when he got to Japan that Martin Luther had preceded him. There are strong likenesses between Pure Land Buddhism and the Protestant theological tradition. Such developments were predicated on the thesis that in the later days of Buddhism it is harder and harder to fulfil its teachings through self-help, and so the Buddha in his wisdom has provided for 'other-help', the easy path.

In the material dimension all this is reflected in the increasingly splendid and numinous representations of the celestial Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be. Temples with quite enormous figures of vast Buddhas become receptacles of *pūjā* and of divine worship. The atmosphere of some big shrines of the Mahayana is somewhat more like that of Western cathedrals, though of very differing style.

As for ritual, the whole doctrine of the grace of Amitābha and of celestial Bodhisattvas leads to the important stress on prayer and simple 'calling on the name', what in Japan came to be called the nembutsu. Devotional religion was replacing in many instances the older concentration upon the contemplative life. The latter was never quite displaced in Buddhism, but a faith much nearer to theism was expressed in similar ways. And in modern times in America the Pure Land manifestations of Japanese and Chinese Buddhism have remarkable borrowings from Protestant ritual.

In the doctrinal and philosophical dimension certain developments led to the teaching known as the *Trikāya* or Three-Body

(Three-Aspect) doctrine. According to this, at the earthly level the Buddha appears in his so-called Transformation Body as the historical Buddha and his predecessors (not to mention Maitreya the future Buddha, the subject of many eschatological hopes and new religious movements). As Gautama, for instance, the Buddha appears at a certain point of history to restore the Dharma, the Teaching or Law. At a higher level, the Buddha may manifest himself as celestial beings, virtually deities, like Amitābha whom I have touched on above. At a still higher level all Buddhas are one in the Truth-Body or *Dharmakāya*. Because the Buddha-nature consists above all in the capacity to realise contemplative and non-dual oneness with Suchness or the Empty, and because this higher state is what the whole Dharma points to, the Buddhas indeed are unified in it. The mystical experience is according to Buddhists *advaya*, non-dual, because all conscicousness of subject and object disappears. It is a dazzling cloud of unknowing which is knowing, without division into 'me' and 'something out there'. So the heart of the Buddha is one with ultimate truth. This is why all Buddhas become one in the *Dharmakāya*. All this is reminiscent of certain more theistic accounts of mysticism. You only have to give a positive interpretation of the Empty and you are not far off from the Deitas of Eckhart, with Amitābha as the Deus. You are not very far off some Hindu theologies in which *nirguṇam brahman* or the Divine without attributes underlies the personal Creator God or Lord.

I have already indicated a resurgence of the numinous experience in the Mahayana. We should also underline that loving devotionalism is vital to the experiential dimension – the perception and appropriation of divine manifestations as expressing love. There is in this some shift away from the more austere, but still beautiful, schematism of the Theravada. The Buddha becomes a person who has the welfare of the faithful at heart, and this is something which enters into the experience of the worshipper.

The self-sacrificing nature of the Bodhisattva leads to a new ethos in which a devoted Buddhist will take a vow to become a Bodhisattva, and treading that path will do good works as befits one who has that ideal at heart. The ideal of self-sacrifice is true compassion, and the hope of universal salvation (for the thought of my being saved while there are still others suffering in this

world and waiting to be saved is repugnant) converges with Christian motifs.

Finally, regarding the organisational dimension, you have the demolition of the requirement of celibacy, since this looks like forcing the hand of the Buddha and trying to gain salvation by works and not by faith. In the married clergy phenomenon there are convergences between Buddhism and Protestantism – though most of Buddhism still practises celibacy, just as this happens in Orthodox monasticism and the Catholic orders.

All in all, then, Buddhism does display some strong convergences with Christianity. It is not too hard for some modern Mahayana Buddhists and sympathetic Christians to come together in dialogue to fashion a merging of Buddhist and Christian ideals. But the harder dialogue still remains, for within Buddhism we have this very strong non-theistic emphasis, beyond the Pure Land schools and beyond the Three-Body Doctrine. This question of the ultimate relationship between Theravada and some of the austerer forms of the Great Vehicle on the one hand and mainstream Christianity on the other remains to be answered. There is a gulf, a rather beautiful one as a matter of fact, and it cannot I believe be bridged. But that is not the point: the point is rather concerned with how they may live together. It is from the perspective of mainline Buddhist philosophy and practice that we need to see the likely living relationship between the two faiths. Here the Chinese example is instructive. For in signifying the Dharma the Chinese not only gave new impulses to Buddhist philosophy but also helped to revitalise the indigenous Taoist and Confucian traditions. Having sketched in this chapter some of the main features of Buddhism I move on in the next to contemplate the ways in which Indian religion and Chinese values came together so creatively.

3 Buddhism in the Context of Chinese Religion and Philosophy

The coming of Buddhism into China, from the 1st Century CE, helped to bring into being a somewhat contradictory, and yet viable, triad of religious forces which shaped Chinese civilisation.[1] As in other cases – for instance the establishment of Christianity in Northern and Eastern Europe and the founding of Indian religious polities in Southeast Asia – it is a good question as to why it was that the incoming ideology and practice were appealing. One may also enquire as to how selective was the receiving culture. In the case of Chinese Buddhism the evolution of three major schools, the Ch'ān, the Hua-yen and the T'ien-t'ai, express different phases of Chinese thinking, so it seems. Ch'ān is full of Taoist emptiness; the second is full of an organicist philosophy; the third is redolent of a pragmatic synthesis. So it is that certain especially Buddhist themes came to be emphasised as the texts, laboriously brought across the silk route and with great puzzlement translated into Chinese, were filtered through a Middle Kingdom net. It is therefore useful for us, in appraising the migration of the Buddha into China, to consider some of the major motifs of the society into which it came, and to contemplate how the Confucian and Taoist traditions looked in those early centuries of the Common Era. It is worth noting too how bizarre and even anti-social Buddhism may have looked to the Chinese as it moved in. Compared with the Confucian ethos, Buddhism was other-worldly: the celibacy of monks and nuns grated against the strong family values of Confucianism. It had an individualistic air (for was not liberation very much an individual affair? – and was not the law of karma a kind of genetic system cutting across the lineages of ancestors, so strong in Chinese consciousness?); and it also brought the strange concepts of a very different, and very distant, culture beyond the deserts and mountains of the West. It should not surprise if from

time to time there were outbreaks of social distrust and political opposition to what was to become China's third religion.

It is also worth noting another factor both of Buddhism's spread and of opposition to it. It was already well developed as a functioning religion with a great deal of popular appeal as it entered into China. It could promise heaven as a reward for good deeds on earth; it offered the accumulation of merit through pious and virtuous acts; it had pilgrimages, temples, rituals of healing, congregational affiliation and colourful ceremonial. All these masked the inherent challenge of its central emphasis upon emptiness. The heart of wisdom had to be clothed in bright robes to make it seductive to those gripped by the world's values. But the Confucian tradition was highly elitist. It was easy for the scholar trained in its ideology and literature to despise the 'superstitions' of the masses, and with it the religion which pandered to those simpler elements of piety.

The Confucianism which dominated during the period of the main introduction of Buddhism, namely the 1st to the 5th Centuries of the Common Era, owed much to the synthesis established at the outset of the Han dynasty (end of the 3rd Century BCE onwards), especially through the writings of Tung Chung-shu (176–104). This wove into the ideas of K'ung such motifs as the yin and yang philosophy, the theory of five elements and Moist personalism. Thus the theory of the interplay of male and female forces connected with the hierarchical moral values of K'ung: the yang could be expressed as the superior moral force of the father and the ruler. The five elements could be linked to an idea of resonances in the cosmos which underpinned theories of divination as found in the *I Ching*. A more personal conception of heaven could give a more vivid sense of the importance of the Mandate of Heaven. This mandate ideology was an important ingredient in the justification of imperial rule. The synthesis achieved by Tung Chung-shu was therefore effective as a State ideology.

Meanwhile Taoism was evolving in two rather diverse directions. One of these was towards what has come to be known, by Western scholars, as religious Taoism. This produced a fairly elaborate hierarchy of gods, in part mirroring China's feudal structure. It also took up the interest in the prolongation of life, through the practice of alchemy and other arts, which had long been a Taoist preoccupation. Religious Taoism was able to

supplement its appeal in due course by copying aspects of Buddhism, such as the monastic system. The other direction of development was into what is sometimes known as Neo-Taoism or 'mysterious learning' – *hsüan-hsüeh* (玄學). This looked back to the profound teachings of the *Lao-tzu* and the *Chuang-tzu*. Perhaps the greatest figure of this movement was Wang Pi (226–249).

He was keen to probe into the meaning of the *wu* or *wu-wei* (無爲). The 'not' of not-acting was not a bare nothing, but something indefinable and unutterable, the mysterious positive nothing out of which being could emerge, and from being the ten thousand things – that is, the formed universe as we know it. The cosmos is seen by him as having two sides, the one being dark, silent and mysterious; and the other the flux of the many, the impermanent. It is of course quite obvious that the philosophy expounded by Wang Pi and others had such strong affinities to the Buddhist *sūnyavāda*, the doctrine of emptiness, that it could be only a matter of time before a union of Buddhist and Taoist notions would occur. Not all Neo-Taoists, however, emphasised the mystery equally. For the 4th Century Kuo Hsiang, for instance, there was no need to think of the *wu* as being some kind of cause 'outside' of the universe: his cosmos was naturalistically conceived, and oneness with nature was nearer to his ideal than some dark apprehension of the Nothing. In laying emphasis upon the positive reality of a unified cosmos Kuo Hsiang took a line which was a good deal less in consonance with the Buddhist philosophies of Emptiness and the Wisdom literature (*Prajñāpāramitā*), so central to the incoming Buddhist Worldview.

One of the bafflements of Buddhism, as its monasteries and preachers came over the Silk Route and into South China by sea, was the plethora of diverse texts. Different groups revered different texts, and to a great degree one could look upon the varieties of Buddhism in China not so much as denominations within some greater whole, but rather as followers of differing holy writs. It is as if when Christianity spread across the Alps, monks brought different bits of the Bible – some the epistles of Paul, others the book of Revelation, others a Gospel, others the Apocrypha, others again the Prophets, and so on. Now something like this did happen in the early Church until Marcion enforced in effect a Canon by his heretical views. But if we can imagine a fragmented arrival of Christian texts, then this is an

analogy to what happened in China. There were also of course supreme difficulties in translating many of these incoming books. Sometimes attempts at phonetic rendering of long Sanskrit words could plunge texts into meaninglessness; while the adoption of common Chinese words like the *tao* to translate Sanskrit terms could facilitate too easy a synthesis.

It was important to achieve some order out of the chaos of interpretations of the *fo-chiao* (佛教). In the late 6th Century when China was reunified under the Sui dynasty there was a favourable opportunity to bring a like unification to the varied paths of Buddhism. There were political advantages too, for a faith that had imperial patronage. What was needed was a comprehensive theory of the evolution of the Buddha's message, so that the various texts could be set in some kind of rational sequence. The architect of the new synthesis was Chih-i, who was, effectively, the founder of the movement known as the T'ien-t'ai (天台), named after the Heavenly Terrace mountain where he had his base.

Among the famous sutras or discourses of the Buddha which had come into China was the Lotus Sutra or *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. It contains some well-known parables, the most important being that which is often called the Prodigal Son. A powerful father's son goes off on his travels and through dissipation exhausts his moneys. He returns home in a filthy and destitute condition, and his father, recognising him, sees that it would be too much of a shock simply to take him back and give him princely status: so he has him employed at menial tasks and slowly promotes him till he is eventually ready for the news that he is the son of this vastly powerful father, whom the son, in his terrible condition, has failed to recognise. So it is with the Buddha: first he gives humankind a lowly teaching, then he gradually unfolds the full truth that we are all heirs to the splendour of Buddhahood. This marks what is termed the Buddha's skill in means or *upaya*, in adapting his message to the diverse conditions of his hearers. Chih-i took this idea and schematised it into the Five Periods (as his doctrine was called) of the Buddha's own life, corresponding to the great texts currently influential in China.

His pristine vision of the world, expressed immediately after the Enlightenment, but too difficult for most people to grasp, is contained in the great sutra which expresses what is known as the Hua-yen. Thereafter he went to Sarnath where he preached

the Lesser Vehicle teachings to his former associates. This narrower view of the truth was suitable for the early period of Buddhism. Then he went on to preach the Great Vehicle. Thereafter he taught the Wisdom Literature or *Prajnā-pāramitā*. Finally, two great texts occupy the fifth period as they were produced more or less simultaneously, namely the Lotus Sutra and the Great Vehicle Sutra of the Great Decease. Of all these teachings the key role is played by the Lotus Sutra, according to Chih-i. It contains the essence of all the others.

All this is not a very historical approach, to say the least: the evidences are against the very notion that the Buddha himself in his own lifetime knew any of the major discourses ascribed to him, even if they may sometimes have been successful in capturing aspects of the spirit of his original teaching. Nevertheless Chih-i was able to bring to bear a complex and highly interesting theory of interpretation on the various sutras. Four sorts of account can be given of a text. One contextualises it in the life of the Buddha (this is the way the above schema of five stages was arrived at). Another looks at the benefits accruing from the teaching expressed in the text. Another deals with whether a text is central or peripheral. The fourth deals with the kind of meditation taught in the text, either directly or by implication. This last point is vital. Chih-i considered that theory and practice had to be held together: and every sort of Buddhist doctrine related to some mode of meditating.

Let me underline this last point. Buddhist philosophy is not purely speculative. It all relates to practice, and itself may be accounted a form of practice. This pragmatic slant in the Buddhist tradition had some strong appeal in the Chinese context, even if to the host country many of the Buddhist scriptures appeared at first bizarre and obscure.

Let us consider the idea of Emptiness or Suchness, so central a focus not only of the dialectics of the famous 2nd Century philosopher Nāgārjuna but also of the Wisdom Literature. You are supposed to use reason in order to see that things are empty, so you follow the rules of philosophy: but it is at the same time a meditative exercise which prepares the ground for the experiential realisation of the truth to which the words point. It is this thought which lies behind the famous idea of the finger pointing at the moon. The finger is useful in indicating the moon, but do not concentrate on the finger: look at the moon. If you see that

existing theories of causation are contradictory, this helps in leading you to the contemplative experience of ultimate emptiness. For instance, if every event is instantaneous (as Buddhist philosophy tended to conclude, as a result of the general doctrine of impermanence) then how can one event cause another? For the first event will have gone out of existence before the second one arises: and nothing can cause nothing. In going over such thoughts you are training yourself in the general context of meditation. In brief, there is a solidarity between theory and spiritual practice.

In the Indian context out of which the sutras and philosophical writings came there was often adumbrated a distinction between two main levels of truth. The first is the higher truth, which can only be indicated, and which deals with the nature of the ultimate. Thus from an ultimate perspective everything is empty. But secondly we still have to use words within the realm of everyday living. If there is cheese in the refrigerator and I say so then I am using language conventionally, even if in the last resort the expressions 'cheese' and 'refrigerator' are merely expressions which we find useful, and there are no such things strictly speaking as cheeses and refrigerators. Chih-i extended and improved upon this distinction by interposing a third level of truth, the middle or *chung* (中). This is the ordinary conventional level but viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. When I say that there is a plum tree on the hillside, but knowing deeply that there is only the empty and that strictly neither plum trees nor hillsides exist, then I have said something at the middle level. This conception of the middle position is highly characteristic of Chinese culture, and it became a commonplace in later exegeses of Buddhist thought in China.

The T'ien-t'ai as expounded by Chih-i and others hoped to become the way of uniting the diverse strands of Chinese Buddhism, and though it in some ways did become a separate denomination its programme was in principle viewed sympathetically in the tradition. It also, in the form of Tendai, played a vital role in Japanese Buddhism. It represents a powerful move in the signification of the dharma. Alongside Hua-yen and Ch'ān it was one of the great creations of Chinese Buddhism. Since I shall be dealing with these last two schools in subsequent chapters, I shall not elaborate on them here, beyond saying that both are related to Taoist trends. The Hua-yen had a positive view of

the concept of dependent origination, or the interelatedness of all events. From much of the Indian viewpoint this was taken negatively: it showed that everything is relative so that nothing has its own *svabhāva* or 'own-nature'. Hua-yen took the matter in a positive way, showing that everything is bound together in an organic network: it expressed a Chinese sense of the harmony of the cosmos. Again Ch'ān Buddhism's emphasis upon spontaneity and naturalness had strong affinities with Taoist *wuwei*.

From the start of the Sui dynasty till 845, towards the end of the T'ang, was a generally golden time in the history of the Buddha's teachings in China, with great measures of imperial support. But in that year there was a severe backlash, provoked by the gathering influence of Taoism at court and a revival of the *ju-chiao* (儒教). The glittering temples, the teeming monks and nuns, the complex philosophies and popular outreach of the Buddhists were maybe bound to cause jealousies. At any rate in 845 considerable devastation occurred to Buddhism's wealth. Over a quarter of a million religious were compelled to disrobe. Though the religion later recovered, these events put a premium on its simpler forms. For the spiritual elite Ch'ān was well placed to survive these storms, and for the populace it was Pure Land Buddhism which had the greatest flexibility and strength. Although Pure Land had of course existed in India and Central Asia, its Chinese form was highly important, and so I shall now say a word about it.

In the previous chapter I discussed briefly the so-called Three-Body or Three-Aspect doctrine. This had as one component the concept of celestial Buddhas. Among these in particular was Amitābha or A-mi-t'o-fo (阿彌陀佛) who was not merely an object of adoration but also the provider of a heaven, the Pure Land to the West, to which the faithful would go on death. Being reborn there, in its glittering and jewel-studded landscape and beside its wondrous and refreshing river, would eventually mean going on to final liberation or nirvana. But the glories of heaven came to displace nirvana in popular imagination. Amitābha was a great focus of devotional piety. He was a supremely compassionate Buddha who was able to help ordinary people in those latter days when adherence to the stricter rules of Buddhism was a hard thing. One possible reason for the ready acceptance of this form of Buddhism by the Chinese was that rebirth was not a native category, and the effect of the Pure Land school was to

short-circuit rebirth. While it has remained a strong strand in Chinese Buddhism its developments in Japan were even more spectacular. Its relevance to the question of the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism lies in the fact that devotionalism is a central ingredient in the Christian faith: there has of course always been a powerful sense of the personhood of God in Christ within the framework of the worship of the Trinity. Yet Pure Land Buddhism also seems like a U-turn from the non-theistic and largely non-devotional ethos of the Theravada. We shall have to address these apparent contradictions later on.

If certain themes in Buddhism were reinforced by the Taoist spirit, Buddhist philosophy itself had an impact upon the Confucian tradition. It was one of the stimulants of that movement which has been known in the West as Neo-Confucianism. There were other factors, during the 10th to the 12th Centuries, in the revival of the *ju-chiao*. Increased urbanisation made for the strengthening of city-based academies of Confucian learning (by contrast the main bases of Buddhist and Taoist learning were monasteries, often rurally sited). The wider use of printing gave greater impetus to book-learning. Imperial patronage helped too. Buddhism offered deep subtleties in its texts, and there was need of a response which would consolidate the metaphysical side of Confucianism which had always been weaker by comparison. The Buddhist ethos, with its relatively world-denying values and flight from the family into the monastery, needed to be struggled against, and some felt that for this it was necessary to put Confucian philosophy on a firmer basis.

The greatest exponent of the *li-hsüeh* (理學) or learning of principle as the new school was often known for short, was Chu Hsi[2] (1130–1200). It became his type of Confucianism that moulded the shape of the actual imperial examination system; and it was his philosophy that predominated in the official ideology. He looked on his predecessor Chou Tun-i (1017–1073) as founder of the new lineage, and Chou had, in his famous book *T'ai-chi t'u-shou*, expounding the diagram of the Great Ultimate (太極), started pregnantly: 'The Non-Ultimate! And also the Great Ultimate.'[3] This seems both Taoist and Buddhist, starting thus with a negation. In trying to capture both the positive and the negative Chou lays the ground for a metaphysical coexistence of the three traditions.

Chu Hsi's work was a great synthesis of a number of tendencies

within his predecessors. He made central use of the contrast between *li* and *Ch'i*, between principle and material force. By identifying *li* with the Great Ultimate he made it somewhat like an impersonal Absolute which is yet present in all instances of *li* in the myriad things of this world. So it is both a transcendent something and a diffracted presence amid the world of the many. There are distant analogues to Neoplatonism. The Neo-Confucian emphasis was on the investigation of things: Chu Hsi's essentialism however meant that outer knowledge need not be empirically wide-ranging, since knowledge of a good instance of some phenomenon would yield knowledge in effect of all the other instances. All this side of Chu Hsi's thought is far removed from the conventionalism of meaning and flux of experience urged by the Buddhists. Yet while Chu Hsi remained rightly loyal to what he conceived to be the canon of Confucian writings, the complexity of his cosmological thought linked up with some emphasis on meditation in the investigation of things which countered, from a traditionalist perspective, the theory and practice of Buddhism.

While Chu Hsi's position remained normative within official Confucianism, there is a much more direct comparison between the subjectivism of Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) and Buddhism. His emphasis on meditation was more striking; while his sense of fellow-feeling for animals and even the material environment finds echoes today. He wrote:

> When (a person) observes the pitiful cries and behavior of birds and animals he cannot help feeling an 'inability to bear' their suffering. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed he cannot help a feeling of pity . . . Even when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed he cannot help a feeling of regret.[4]

His picture of the noble sage is a good counterpart and challenge to the Buddhist *arhat* or Bodhisattva.

In general, then, I would contend that Buddhism has played a specially dynamic role in the evolution of Chinese thought. Its very foreignness was an advantage, for it brought something new and difficult into Chinese civilisation, and the resultant dialectic with native forces could be very fruitful. But especially over the

last thousand years it has found its place in theory and substance within the fabric of Chinese religion. The theory is that of the *san chiao* (三教) – the so-called 'three religions of China' which in prerevolutionary China lived together as part of a more general whole. Chinese religion was functionally made up of three religions which could coexist for overlapping but somewhat diverse purposes.

Actually the situation is rather more complicated than the *san chiao* theory indicates, partly because of regional variations, but more importantly because there is a fourth element, namely the complex of folk religion out of which the three major elements rise like mountains. This overlaps with the traditions but contains elements such as the reverence for ancestors which could be seen as popular contributions to the wider Chinese synthesis.

One of the reasons why the *san chiao* was possible in prerevolutionary China was the Buddhist attitude to popular religions. As we have seen it has not been its wont to clash head-on with religions in its environment. It has been patient of gods and brahmins, emasculating them along the way. It has not felt divine beings to be a threat, either because they can be treated as forces within the cosmos and of no transcendental significance; or because, in its Amitābhas and Bodhisattvas, it has substitute divinities of its own, brought up within the ethos of the Buddhist moral system. Further, we have noted the T'ien-t'ai synthesis, which paved the way for the more general theory of the three religions by first of all blending the diverse Buddhist teachings and subtraditions into something which approached a coherent whole.

Nevertheless we should not overdo talk of the harmonious and organic character of traditional religion in China. After all, the traditions offered alternatives: between formality and spontaneity, between central government and anarchic hopes of the future, between family life and celibacy. But as the *san chiao* settled down to coexistence, they came to have a dialectical relationship: sometimes challenging one another and sometimes reinforcing one another. Since China was for long so successful in unifying them, there were dangers of smug and uncritical traditionalism, which the three religions, and especially Buddhism, did in some degree challenge.

Buddhism did not only contribute to Chinese civilisation. The Chinese-influenced cultures of Korea and Japan also owed a great

deal to the heritage of the Buddha. In Korea[5] there were notable scholars and spiritual leaders, such as the exponent of Hua-yen, Uisang (625–702), and the great Sŏn or Ch'an master Chinul (1158–1210), who synthesised scholastic and experimental approaches to Buddhist truth. There were also notable Neo-Confucian writers, including Yi T'oegye (1501–1570) and Yi Yulgok (1536–1584) who made notable contributions especially in moral psychology.

In Japan, Buddhism became the dominant religion. The way of the *kami* – the native gods – only really gained great independent power in modern times, after the Meiji restoration; while Confucian and Taoist thought did not have the cultural influence which they naturally had in China. Only during the Tokugawa period preceding the Meiji did Confucian thought really flourish. The main period of the flowering of Japanese Buddhism can be said to be the Kamakura period, from the late twelfth till the fourteenth Centuries. In this time we have the founding of Japanese True Pure Land Buddhism under Shinran (1173–1262), which was highly radical, Nichiren Buddhism (founded by Nichiren (1222–1283)) and the major Zen schools.

The Japanese extended Chinese thinking about the period of the latter end of the Dharma, or *mappō*. The notion was that after two thousand years there would come the third age of Buddhism. Since the Chinese calculated that the decease of the Buddha occurred in 849 BCE, this period was beginning in the 12th Century, which in Japan was a period of hardship and anarchy. 1052 (viz. 2001 years later) was to be the key date. During the *mappō* the ideal of enlightenment has all but gone, the Order is in trouble and the sound of the Buddha's message seems but a far-off echo. Happily the Buddha has anticipated the problem and has provided an easy path in such turbulent times. Rather than the old doctrine of *jiriki* – that one must strive for liberation through one's own exertions, in reliance on oneself – there was now the idea of *tariki* or reliance on the other. That other was the Buddha Amitābha, or Amida in Japanese. The devotion to this great focus of faith was the central message of Honen (1113–1212). Even more radical was his follower Shinran, who did not shrink from applying the logic of grace. If all that is needed is the *nembutsu*, or simple homage to the Buddha, then all works are vain. If a virtuous man can be saved how much more can a sinner! As a consequence of a vision he had of the gracious lady

Kannon (Kuan-yin), he gave up celibacy and married. He raised a family: all this to show that faith and everyday living can blend together, and there is absolutely no use in works of asceticism or piety. Forms of Pure Land Buddhism are even today flourishing and represent a major strand in Japanese religion.

Nichiren was a somewhat different character: aggressive and nationalistic. For him it was enough to call upon not Amida, in faith, but the Lotus Sutra. His formula, used by followers to express their fervour, was *Namu Myōhōrengekyō* or 'Adoration to the Lotus of the True Law'. The second half of that sutra deals with the teachings of the transcendental Sakyamuni – the earthly Buddha transformed into a brilliant celestial Lord. For Nichiren the idea of homage to the Lotus rested on the thought that in adoring it you adore what it is about – what it points to. The Absolute as phenomenalised in Sakyamuni is the object of homage. Nichiren, however, was not as complaisant as other Buddhists: he fiercely attacked other denominations with a fiery and nationalistic evangelicalism. His movement, adapted to modern conditions, is a major contemporary force in Japanese religious life and politics, through the Soka Gakkai and its parallel political arm the Komeito party. Its aggressive attitudes sometimes lead other Buddhist denominations to think it un-Buddhist.

At about the same time as the emergence of Honen's and Shinran's messages, Zen Buddhism established itself in Japan, through the work of such figures as Eisai (1141–1215) and Dogen (1200–1253) who introduced Rinzai and Soto variants of the meditation school. They played a great part in Japanese culture and arts. Some innovations were breathtaking – like teaching enlightenment through the martial arts and teamaking. Dogen rejected the theory of *mappō*: and indeed we can see in Zen a great revival in contemplative Buddhism, whose message is not so very distant from that of the Theravada. It is as if the wheel of the Dharma had come full circle from ancient Sri Lanka to medieval Japan. The spirit and cultural milieu of each tradition is very different looked at culturally: but both shared a perception of the central essence of the Buddha's path.

I shall be returning to further consideration of Chinese Ch'ăn, Korean Sŏn and Japanese Zen when I discuss the relations between Eastern and Western mysticism in the next chapter. Meanwhile, let us look briefly at Buddhism, and China, in the modern period. How did the three religions respond to the severe

problems posed by the impact of the West? First, it must be recognised that China's modern dilemmas have been born of an awakening nationalism. The old China had its imperial stance: but a strong sense of nationhood requires external challenges and contrast. It is true that Han Chinese could feel aggrieved that the dynasty was Manchu, and this element of national feeling was to play a complicating role in the last days of the Empire. But it was the impact of the marauding West which presented to the Chinese the thought that China would have to see itself as a nation among nations and to reform itself in order to fight off these unnaturally powerful forces. The full expression of national feeling was relatively slow in coming: it perhaps was marked by the Cultural Revolution in May 1919, and occasioned by what Chinese saw as the disgraceful treatment of the country by the signatory powers at Versailles. There had been earlier, rather directionless, reform movements – notably the Taiping revolution after the Opium Wars, where charismatic semi-Christian ideas were grafted on to a widespread rural rebellion. There had been the somewhat bourgeois reformist notions of K'ang Yu-wei (1858–1927). But in fact Confucianism was in a poor position to supply the needed new ideology, because it was until 1905 effectively the worldview of an old bureaucratic class whose literary education ill-equipped it to appreciate the new demands of scientific education and the revision of national institutions. Something of a new worldview which might express the new China was put together by Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), and then exploited by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975). It was maybe no coincidence that these nationalist leaders were both Christians, for Christian missions had mediated much of Western education and ideas.

In all this Buddhism did not play a notable part. Though its outlook was in consonance with modern science, so that in principle it was well placed to contribute to Chinese reawakening, its natural tendency in the early 20th Century was towards reform of its own offerings, during a period of massive rediscovery of its past under the stimulus of modern Western scholarship. The greatest Chinese figure in this revival, T'ai Hsü (1890–1947), was concerned with the revival of Buddhist spirituality. Though Buddhism can take nationalist forms, as the history of recent nationalism shows, and though Buddhist societies can paradoxically give rise to violent movements, such

as the Khmer Rouge and the JVP – both quasi-Marxist nationalist rural ideologies – it is not altogether well fitted as a vehicle of national sentiment, and especially so in China where the very structure of the *san-chiao* would suggest that a broader-based religious patriotism might be necessary. As we have seen, Confucian ideology had grave weaknesses as regards modernisation. It would have to pass through a period of purgation before emerging in its contemporary cleaned up form, seen as fit to be an underpinning for capitalist nationalism in Singapore and elsewhere. Taoism was implicated in too many traditional forms of alchemy and medicine to take kindly to the modern scientific outlook. Moreover, though Buddhism and Confucianism could well have appeal among a middle class which favoured both individualism and some degree of elitism, that middle class was not well enough developed in the China of 1911 and after to form a strong basis for new democracy. The temptation therefore of bourgeois politicians was to form alliances with older feudal forces. Mao Zedong (1893–1975),[6] however, took a parallel view: the intellectuals and proletariat were also too weak by themselves, and so what was needed was an alliance with the rural masses. The peasants came in to swamp the opposition.

The ultimate victory of the Communist Party in 1949 was to be a disaster for traditional religion and, in particular, Buddhism. It was a vulnerable faith, being so substantially based on monasteries, which could be closed or tightly controlled. Moreover the firmly Buddhist nation of Tibet had its traditional values suppressed to a great degree, and the flight of the Dalai Lama and his subsequent impact on the West have been a symbol both of Buddhism's weakness and its vitality. One of the questions on our agenda after forty years is whether the Marxist regime can reform itself in a way which will enable the traditional religions fully to re-emerge. Can China evolve a four-value system (*szu-chiao* 四教)? I shall address that question in a later chapter.

In brief, Buddhism has played a formative and stimulating role in Chinese civilisation, and more broadly in the cultures of the Far East. Whatever its future in mainland China and Tibet it remains active among diaspora Chinese and in Korea and Japan: moreover it is making progress in the West, as the most successful of the 'foreign' religions there in converting or influencing people from traditional Christian and Jewish backgrounds. For all the tragedies

which have occurred to it in recent decades – in Tibet, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Sri Lanka – it is still one of the major heritages of world civilisation.

4 Meditation in the Two Traditions – Nirvana versus God

I do not think that we can see Christianity in its earliest days as greatly absorbed in the contemplative life. As an offshoot of Jewish culture it came from an ambience of worship and sacrifice. While mystical tendencies were not absent in this period of Jewish religion, the primary emphasis in the burgeoning Christian faith came to be sacramental: the ritual and experiential participation of the faithful in the mysterious power of Christ (and indeed, as it was perceived, God in Christ). On the other hand the early Buddhist records are full of contemplation, of yoga, of self-awareness, and they are sceptical and even disdainful of the sacramental and sacrificial system of the Brahmins. Nevertheless, the contemplative life came to be important in the Christian Church, partly because of the growth of monasticism, a natural milieu for the life of self-training, and partly because of the influence of Neoplatonism.

Despite the very different cultural milieux of the two practices – Buddhist yoga and Christian contemplation – could we say that the experiences they generated are the same? There has been, over the last twenty-five years, considerable debate about the philosophical and historical issues involved. Many of the issues are presented in the lively volume edited by Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Broadly speaking there are three main positions. One may be described as strong contextualism. This affirms that the meaning of any type of action or experience is tied inevitably to the web of interconnections which constitutes its context. Steven Katz veers towards this position, but in the subsequent discussion I shall sharpen its focus in ways which he might not share. The second view might be called one of moderate diversity. This holds, as with R.C. Zaehner, that a personalistic mysticism exemplified in

Christian and other forms of theism differs from the impersonalistic mysticism exhibited in certain Eastern religions. The third view may be called the thesis of underlying unity. This is a view I have expressed, notably in my article 'Mystical Experience and Interpretation', first published in 1965 and reprinted elsewhere, including in a volume of my papers, *Concept and Empathy* (Donald Wiebe, editor, 1986). In this I argued against Zaehner's position. The underlying unity theme is found in different and more metaphysical forms in the writings of W.T. Stace, Aldous Huxley, Swami Vivekananda, Frithjof Schuon and others. However, these writers largely or wholly ignore Theravada Buddhism, and some of them see the main type of mysticism as involving realisation of identity with a soul or permanent self – an interpretation foreign to Buddhism.

It is of course always easy to argue for the full contextuality of religious experience, since every report of mystical encounter occurs within a particular human and religious framework. But contextualism goes too far. It would make all comparisons impossible. There would be no sacrifice but only Jewish sacrifice, Hindu sacrifice and so on; no God but only the Jewish God, the Hindu God and so forth. For the principles of contextualism would apply to far more than to types of religious experience. Ultimately it would make particular religions impossible to talk about cross-culturally. This would be a kind of methodological fideism, which would be stultifying to all theory about religion and all dialogue. Such a barren position does not need further refutation. Its positive truth can be taken account of in the following way.

We can deem each religious system or schema of beliefs and practices as being partially organic – that is any one item in it is affected by all the others, so that the significance of similar items will be woven into a wider fabric. Thus, for instance, the Christian belief that God creates the universe is affected by the belief that Christ is God and Saviour. It makes a difference to the meaning of the idea of creation. But there remain likenesses between, for instance, Jewish and Islamic beliefs in creation compared with Christian ones. There might be a useful illustration in the following thought: a patch of red in one picture is a rose, and in another a sail. The two reds are similar, but their significance varies contextually. Or let us think of a typical renaissance crucifixion scene and compare it to Salvador Dali's famous picture in which the angle of vision is above Jesus. The

context of the different images of the suffering Christ is alike but their significance varies subtly.

In any event it does not seem to me likely that mystics who have devoted themselves to roughly similar practices and are committed to an interior quest which attempts to eliminate exterior sense-impressions should have radically diverse experiences on the basis of their cultural conditioning. This is not to say that there might not be differing patterns cross-culturally, say two or three varieties, which we would need to differentiate. But that each tradition should produce its own well-defined type of experience (as distinguished from context of meaning) does not seem to me very credible.

Even within Buddhism it may be that we ought to separate out different kinds of experience. There are accounts in the *Therī-* and *Thera-gāthā* (the poems of early nuns and monks) of sudden 'eyes-open' conversions: for instance a monk goes into the main street of a village and sees a girl who is beautifully and sexily made up, dancing in the main road. Suddenly this recluse sees the misery of it all, and the truth of the noble doctrine of suffering and indeed of the whole teaching becomes transparent to him.

Moreover, it is a commonplace that in the Buddhist tradition metaphysics and meditation go together: and there are two major aspects to the Buddhist worldview – one is the affirmation of what I shall in a rather Western way call the transcendent, of nirvana or Suchness; and the other is the claim that the cosmos is impermanent, or interconnected and having no individual substance. Broadly these notions correspond to two aspects of experience. The one relates to the inner quest, typically worked at through the scheme of stages of meditation or *jhānas* (I shall return to these shortly), and the other relates to a vision of the cosmos, maybe under influence of the transcendental experience, but somewhat different from it. It is thus logical for Chih-i (538–597), referred to in the previous chapter, to have thought of the Hua-yen metaphysics as being that which the Buddha used to express his view of the cosmos immediately after his enlightenment.[1] It is like going to a mountain top: having ascended there you come down to the plain looking at your surroundings differently. Having reached the pinnacle of *samādhi* or meditation, the world about you appears in a new guise – transparently impermanent and without substance though glittering with interconnections.

So it is a possible hypothesis that there are two main kinds of Buddhist mystical experience. Then there is a third factor to consider. The whole development of devotional Buddhism sprang in part from the elevation of Buddhas to mighty and celestial condition. They became gods. They display many of the characteristics of the divinity of Western theism: they create heavens, they dispense grace, they are recipients of worship, they have glorious buildings, etc. It seems to me that their emergence arises not at all from the mystical and cosmic visions just recited, but rather from Otto's numinous experience, such as converted Paul, summoned Isaiah, animated Muhammad, inspired Blake and so forth. In its softer form the numinous faith is devotional religion: grace is the good news of fear. The reason for this is that the person confronted by the Holy realises that holiness can only come from the Holy, and so her or his salvation depends upon the Other. It becomes a supreme sign of the Other's love for the worshipper.

It will be noted that here I distinguish, unlike Otto, between numinous and mystical experience. He delineates well the sense of the *tremendum*: but this does not match so much of what goes on inwardly among mystics – such as a sense of the disappearance of the subject-object relationship, the bliss of timelessness, the peace (and so lack of dynamism within) and so forth. Now that I have raised the issue of whether we should think of two differing types of Buddhist mysticism, and given that the worship of celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the Mahayana represents another strand, the question amounts to the possibility that three major kinds of religious experience are operative in Buddhism.

There is additionally the question posed by Zaehner, as to whether there is an extra kind of mysticism, found most typically in the theistic religions where the inner encounter is with a Person, and differs in flavour from the non-personal loss of subject-object dualism. Or is it the case that we could account for the apparent difference of the mystical reports by seeing that the lives and utterances of theistic mystics, being already soaked in the language of personal encounter, duality and the numinous Other, project personalism inward upon the non-dual experience?

This of course raises the tricky question of how we are to estimate the status of the reports by mystics of their inner voyages. Do they not, quite understandably, use the doctrinal

language in which they have been schooled which will in some degree creep into the way they report? How do we go beyond culturally-induced accretions on experience and penetrate so to speak to the phenomenology? And is this not a vain enterprise in so far as their beliefs and feelings about what they are doing in delving into their own psyches is fundamentally part of their experience? The thought that I am making love with a wife on my honeymoon inevitably colours my experience: the very concepts of wife and honeymoon are culturally formed within the ambit of the civilisation within which I have been raised.

I have used this example of sex partly because it both reinforces and undermines the thesis of strong contextualism. We can well realise that because of the contexts – the experiences of the sailor on shore leave in the local red light district, the experience of the honeymooner, the experience of the sultan in his harem, the experience of the monogamous adulterer and the experience of the high school lad or lass's first sexual encounter – all differ very greatly in significance. But on the other hand, who can doubt that the fundamental sensations of sex are very similar? So can it not easily be that the mystical encounters have a profound phenomenological similarity even though the way they are described differs very greatly from one civilisation to another? Of course we would have to frame a wider phenomenology which would make sense of the fact that some mystics use the language of personal encounter while others do not: in other words, Zaehner's position would have to be taken care of in a sensitive and reasonable way.

I have referred to a possible two kinds of Buddhist mysticism. Let me concentrate on the first of these, what may be termed introvertive mysticism: the other we may call the cosmic experience. It may be noted that where a mystic described his experience as being, for instance, an encounter with Christ, he must be going beyond the phenomenology, since the very concept of Christ is anchored in history, and one cannot have access to history by closing one's eyes. If a mystic uses this language, then, she is employing a relatively ramified term, that is a term which involves or presupposes a rather ramified network of claims. The less ramified the account the nearer we are to a basic phenomenology of the experience. One of the tasks of the comparative study of religion is to bring out resemblances in basic structures, and this will involve something akin to literary criticism.

When we examine the literature of Buddhist contemplation we find ourselves in rarefied places. It is often very formally expressed. The major works in question, such as Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*, read sometimes like technical manuals. Western mystical literature makes use of general directives, such as those which enjoin the reader to turn away from engagement with the senses, but without the detailed instructions on how this is to be done, which characterise Buddhist treatises on the contemplative life. Even a relatively early scriptural passage describing the eight stages of deliverance has a somewhat austere format. The Buddha is speaking:

> These then, Ananda, are the eight stages of deliverance, namely – Having awareness of one's own external form, one sees forms. This is the first stage. Unaware of one's external form, one sees external forms. That is the second stage. The third stage is this: 'Lovely', with this form one becomes intent. Then, passing wholly beyond perceptions of form, all sense perceptions dying away, heedless of all perceptions of the plural world, conscious of space as infinite, one enters into and stays in the sphere of infinite space. This is the fourth stage. The fifth stage is when one goes beyond that stage to the stage of infinite consciousness, when one is aware of consciousness as infinite. That is the fifth stage. The sixth stage is when one goes beyond infinite consciousness and thinks that there is nothing whatever, and so enters into and stays in the stage of nothingness. Seventh, one goes beyond nothingness and enters into the stage of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. The eighth stage is when one goes beyond the stage of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and enters into and abides in a stage when perception and feeling are suspended.[2]

The Buddha goes on to associate the practice of these states – being able to go into them and out of them at will and being capable of practising them in ascending or descending order – closely with the attainment of liberation, both of the intellect and of the heart. The form in which the stages are presented nearly corresponds to the traditional set of eight *jhānas*, which became the standard expression of the heart of Buddhist meditational practice. These consisted of four stages in the realm of form (that is, four stages in which some outer device is used to aid medita-

tion, such as a round piece of clay or a blue flower) and four formless *jhānas* – corresponding to the third to seventh of the steps listed above, that is from infinite space to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. It looks as if the stages of the realm of form have been cut to three to allow the eighth stage to be added (sometimes it is added as a ninth to the basic array of eight *jhānas*). The explanation is no doubt that the number eight for a meditational schema was conventional, for it recurs in the Yoga system, but the Buddhists, recognising that some other yogis also talked of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, wanted to go one better. It was in other words a bit of spiritual one-up-man-ship.

I have attempted in my *Reasons and Faiths* (London: Routledge and Kegal Paul, 1958) to give an intelligible phenomenology of these states, corresponding to the various formulae repeated such as 'There is nothing' and 'There is infinite consciousness' – the only one I think offered in English. I shall not repeat that analysis here, beyond saying that the sequence is designed to reduce the perceptual and conceptual content of consciousness to the minimum. This refined state itself can have a more positive description in being the highest bliss, in the sense that one goes beyond feelings of pleasure, elation, sense of accomplishment, etc., into a condition of utter equanimity. It is also a timeless state. It also has the property of overcoming the subject-object duality which typifies our ordinary consciousness. No doubt the way in which *nibbāna* or nirvana is described in the Pali texts reflects something of these higher stages of contemplation. It is the supreme happiness, the permanent or deathless place and the end of concern with the self or ego.

It is a wrong view to treat the *jhānas* themselves as being the attainment of nirvana, for three reasons. First, nirvana in this life is a dispositional state, being free of the obnoxious influences which bind a person to the round of rebirth. Second, though attaining that state may involve some kind of experience such as the *jhānas* lead up to, it is not identical to an experience, since it involves not just that egolessness referred to but also lack of rebirth as a person upon decease (in short it contains in its concept a web of ramified doctrines going beyond any simple experience). Third, there are ethical purifications embedded in the path which are not exhausted by the ability to still feelings as in the eightfold *jhānas*. The problem of the connection between

the ethical and the mystical was something which made a profound impact on Buddhist thinking: does not the individualism of the quest for liberation itself pose a challenge to the ethos of compassion for others? It was out of this question that the Bodhisattva ideal in the Mahayana came to prominence, fusing the ethical and the mystical quest for liberation into a single heroic figure.

Still, in the Theravada tradition, the practice of the *jhānas* is given prominence. We do not know, but it may be that it formed the background to those 'eyes-open' conversions which are sometimes recorded in the *Therī-gāthā* and the *Thera-gāthā*. But they describe in detail a process of self-training which may have analogues to Western mysticism.

We may note that the Buddha decided on the basis of his cosmological vision of the impermanence of everything that the idea of a soul was unnecessary: it was sufficient to have a permanent state or goal, namely nirvana, which could sum up the required notions that liberation is possible and that it transcends the impermanent world. Beyond this, the Buddha's application of the negative path was rigorous, and is rather like the negative theology of Dionysius the Areopagite and his successors (save that in the Western tradition the notion of thing or substance ruled).

If one wanted to equate the attainment of the higher states of contemplation in Buddhism and Christian mystical states it would have to be on the following bases. First, the language of Christian mysticism is suffused with ramified concepts such as the ideas of the Trinity and God, but the underlying phenomenology is similar. Second, this in part is indicated by the similarity of negations in the two traditions. For instance, the following is a quotation from the famous Eastern Orthodox theologian and mystic, Gregory Palamas:

> The super-essential nature of God is not a subject for speech or thought or even contemplation, for it is far removed from all that exists and more than unknowable, being founded upon the uncircumscribed might of the celestial spirits – incomprehensible and ineffable to all for ever. There is no name whereby it can be named, neither in this age nor in the age to come, nor word found in the soul and uttered by the tongue, nor contact whether sensible or intellectual, nor yet any image

> which may afford any knowledge of its subject, if this be not that perfect incomprehensibility which one acknowledges in denying all that can be named.[3]

Some of this formulation goes back to Pseudo-Dionysius and through him doubtless to Plotinus, who wrote as follows:

> It is not something, neither is it of any kind or degree; it is not mind, it is not soul; it is not moved, nor again does it remain still; it is neither in space nor in time; it is in itself of one kind, or rather without kind, being before all kind.[4]

In some of these utterances we are inevitably reminded of echoes from far away: 'the name which can be named is not the eternal name' (as in the *Lao-Tzu*), and 'it moves and it moves not' in the *Īśa Upaniṣad*).

Third, in trying to reconcile Buddhism and Christian mysticism, one could argue that viewed from a context of *bhakti* or devotional religion, such as characterises mainstream Christianity, some of the impersonally described states of higher attainment could be seen as personally rooted. I have referred to these rather minimally as: bliss, timelessness and non-duality. Let me set beside these a quotation from Orthodoxy again. Here is a short passage from St Isaac the Syrian:

> As the saints in the world to come no longer pray, their minds having been engulfed in the Divine Spirit, but dwell in ecstasy in that excellent glory, so the mind, when it has been made worthy of perceiving the blessedness of the age to come, will forget itself and all that is here, and will no longer be moved by the thought of anything.[5]

This state is one of perfect rest or *hesuchia*. All this seems to me to be quite compatible with the blissfulness of nirvana referred to above. It also continues the spirit of negative language, and when the mind forgets everything here this is quite easily understood through the more formal procedures of the Buddhist stages of meditation.

The *advaya* or non-dual character of mystical experience as seen in much of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions is significant in that there is usually affirmed, rather strongly, some kind of

gap, however intimate the union, between God and creature in the theistic faiths. But there are strains in this, as the utterances of Rumi and Hallaj, among others, attest. St Gregory Palamas writes:

> He who participates in the divine energy himself becomes, to some extent, light; he is united to the light, and by that light he sees all that remains hidden to those who do not have this grace; thus he transcends not only the bodily senses, but also all that can be known by the intellect.[6]

Note, by the way, that here is a sort of *gnosis*, which is, in the spirit of the *Cloud of Unknowing* also an ignorance or *agnosia*. One is reminded of the *prajñā* or insight (wisdom) of the Buddhist schools. But the passage is chiefly of interest for that phrase 'becomes, to some extent, light'. I would suggest that Gregory holds back with that 'to some extent' because of the whole theistic and dualistic tradition of the Christian faith. It is indeed quite possible that Buddhist *advaya* is compatible with the *actual* Christian experience.

It is of course of the essence of Christian theology to hold that God is beyond time and space, being transcendent. The eternal nature of God could well have been held to have been established by mystics in those rarefied levels of experience where space and time are left behind.

In these remarks I have of course cited only one corner of the multiform Christian tradition. I aim only to put the possibility that Buddhist and Christian interior practice are very much, in their deeper phenomenology, the same. Let me expand this picture. The Christian mystic, according to this account, evolves very similar techniques to the Buddhist (and, by the way, contemplative practices of breathing exercises were prominent in that Orthodox movement known as Hesychasm, in conjunction with the use of the Jesus prayer 'O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner' – these exercises were similar to modes in use both among Indian yogis and Taoist practitioners). But the whole context of her search is theism. She sets out on an inner quest for God in the depths of her soul: and because the mystic lives in a monastery or convent typically he or she is nourished by the daily performance of the eucharistic sacrament. In this milieu, after many strivings in the contemplative life, she

attains to the highest pinnacle, being timeless, blissful (or absolutely peaceful) and non-dual. She thinks because of the timelessness that she has reached the Eternal One. Because of the bliss she believes herself to have gained that peace of God which passes all understanding. Because she has attained non-duality she thinks she has merged with the light, with the ineffable divine being. This union is a merger, for a time. But the soul of the mystic returns to earth (so to speak). So she thinks of herself as different from God yet having been united with Him or Her – this is the mystical union. Because love both sexual and otherwise, though especially the sexual, is a symbol of the union of two in one, the mystical union seems to show forth God's overwhelming love. It is in my view a plausible picture. From this point of view we do not have to have two forms of mysticism, one non-personal and the other personal. Which interpretation of the ultimate is right is of course quite a different matter. The Christian may feel that the Theravada Buddhist, in the interests of intellectual economy, has far too austere and exiguous a picture of the ultimate; and he in turn may think that Christianity has gone overboard on the numinous and the sacramental.

All this remains valid for the Mahayāna interpretation of mystical experience, where the ultimate is expressed differently – not as a minimal nirvana like light at the end of the tunnel of rebirth, but as emptiness underlying everything we perceive. The essence of Buddhahood is emptiness or suchness, and in attaining the highest contemplative insight we become non-dually identified with that suchness. We become Buddhas. Or more strictly we realise that we were Buddhas and suchness all along. That vision of liberation is consistent with all that I have sketched in regard to the practice of the contemplative life.

But there is something more which we need to consider, and that is what I have called the 'eyes-open' or cosmic vision. Here we may look at the distinctive Chinese expression of the mystical tradition, through Ch'ān Buddhism (of course *Ch'ān* is just the Chinese pronunciation of Sanskrit *dhyāna* which in turn is *jhāna* in Pali).

Perhaps we may begin by emphasising that the kind of meditation in Ch'ān is not the same as in the Theravada. This is made very clear in Northern Ch'ān. Both the Buddhist and the Christian mysticism which we have touched on involve cutting off the senses, withdrawing attention from the outer world. The

Ch'ān method, while it does not eschew introspection altogether (for a person has to investigate both outer and inner states, and in particular needs to see the purity of his or her own mind), is a midpoint between the introvertive mystic and the ordinary person. The latter is bombarded by sensations and does not, so to say, see behind them into the true nature of the cosmos around her or him. The state which is aimed at is a purification of the senses. The problem and the solution are described as follows:

> The eye sees, the mind is aware, knows, thoughts arise, and numerous concepts are born; there are divisions and barricades, and one does not understand. Just this is the defiled realm of *dharmas*, the realm of the sentient being. If the eye sees, the mind is aware and one is freed from thinking, then there are no barriers and divisions, and this is the pure realm of dharmas: it is the realm of Buddhas.[7]

So what the Ch'ān tradition here aims to produce is an absolutely clear-sighted vision of the way things are. But one must remove the concepts which clutter up the way we see the world. How this view of the cosmos is expressed itself may owe quite a lot to cultural conditions. It may be that the Ch'ān or Zen experience relates to what Zaehner has described as the panenhenic experience, where all is one and one realises one's oneness with the all. I think it is probable. Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart* may have arrived at a Zen vision in a natural way. I do not wish to go into this issue here, but rather to observe that this clarity of vision into the universe makes sense of the Buddha's deliverances on impermanence, and it could have a certain affinity with the nirvana quest as described earlier. For the vision of the non-dual blissful permanent state could well, actually, be a prelude to the other clear vision. I say this despite the negativity sometimes shown by Ch'ān towards the introvertive quest.

Ch'ān Buddhism dislikes, of course, duality – in this sense it pursues the non-dual ideal which is the light at the end of the Theravadin tunnel. Can one make sense of this turning away from a conceptual understanding of the world? Does it not itself fall into contradiction? Is it not somewhat disgracefully anti-intellectual? Is it not a traditional Derrida run amok in our rational world? Let me just sketch the strength of its vision.

Between nature and ourselves there is a dialectic. For instance, the process of scientific discovery involves our proposing various theories, thinking up new ones, modifying old ones, partly at least because nature is somewhat cussed: it keeps lifting the veil on its true nature and revealing annoying new phenomena. Just when Kelvin was telling students that the major problems in physics had been resolved, Madame Curie was burning her fingers on radioactivity. We struggle to find the right concepts to fit Nature's shimmering figure. We know that beyond our ingenious ideas there swarm an ocean of mysterious processes. Likewise, when we photograph the beauties of the world, or simply gaze at the fresh dawn, we may be afflicted with creative doubts. 'Dawn' – is that really what nature is doing? At best it is a very partial view. Only people confined to the surface of a sphere would really think of the sun as rising over the horizon. Or think of it as pink and the sky as blue. Only those who see a short range of the spectrum would see the sun as having such a determinate contour. Really it is a swarm of radiations, thinning out from what we think of as the surface. The very concept of a surface, by the way, is suspect: suitable for creatures with the kind of sensory apparatus that we have. Ch'ān Buddhism feeds off such thoughts. Really the cosmos is a process in itself (note I do not use the Kantian 'things-in-themselves', because 'things' is inappropriate – and I guess that both singular and plural are inappropriate, as belonging to the phenomenal world of our concepts, though singularity is less inappropriate). It is the Ch'ān desire for us to see the process, that is the deep process, within the phenomenal that occurs to our senses. But, it will be objected, I have used concepts to delineate this vision which lies beyond concepts. From this angle it may turn out that the Buddha's message is contradictory. So it is. If it has merit, this lies in the fact that it uses words in order to engineer a vision that lies beyond words. This is in part why Southern Ch'ān, and more powerfully Japanese Rinzai Zen, are happy to use maddening riddles which twist the intellect by their paradoxicality. What if they do rest on contradictions? Many utterances can be seen as heavily performative. The contradiction taken seriously may breed the experiences and sudden awakenings which get us to see the world afresh. Eventually we may be able to synthesise the familiar and the novel, the old way of thinking and the new, the transcendental truth and the lower truth. Once we have seen

the rose afresh, and it is stripped of its conceptual thorns, then we may not have to flee from ordinary language. This is partly what is involved in the middle view of language found in Hua-yen, to which I shall turn in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, what are these fresh visions seen in the context of the Christian faith? I think one must notice that the Christian would bring to a vision of the world the suffusing influence of the doctrine of creation. The process beyond and within phenomena once we have stripped away concepts will still be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. The Light within the process will be identified (as with the inner light) with the Creator. The result will look like Brother Lawrence's *Practice of the Presence of God*. I shall comment more on this in dealing with the Hua-yen system.

If my main thesis is correct, about introvertive mysticism, what does this imply for Buddhist-Christian dialogue? Several things. First, it implies that, from the Christian angle, it is possible for people in other faiths to have an experience of God without knowing that it is God. It would be like seeing a Rolls-Royce without knowing that it is a Rolls-Royce. Or perhaps more deeply, seeing an elephant and thinking it a rock. There is nothing absurd in this supposition, especially given the elusive, difficult and paradoxical nature of mystical states. Second, from the Buddhist perspective, the Christian mystic has a glimpse of *Tathatā* or Suchness, perhaps, but deludedly wraps that vision in the clothes of faith in a personal God. Given faith in God it is not ridiculous to suppose that the Christian would do this: in this manner the Buddhist would preserve his view that the ultimate truth lies beyond the notion of a personal Deity. Third, more particularly from the Theravadin perspective, the Christian's somewhat confused interpretation of his experience would show that he had a glimpse of the same reality as is indicated by the term nirvana, but has out of ignorance identified it with a perception of his own God. Fourth, the Theravadin would argue that whereas mystical experience is a valid way to know the truth, the numinous experience is not. In fact I have had precisely this debate with the eminent Buddhist philosopher K.N. Jayatilleke of Sri Lanka, and with the great scholar of *Prajnāpār-amitā*, Edward Conze. The latter, having been a Calvinist by upbringing, was especially acerbic about the numinous, seeing the Barthian gap between heaven and earth in a most hostile light, and repudiating the attendant doctrine of original sin.

Jayatilleke was gentler: he just did not see the force of the numinous, perceiving it as the sort of feeling which makes human beings go to the gods, which is neither a big deal in Buddhism nor especially healthy from a long-term spiritual angle. But fifth, the Christian could argue that while such as Jayatilleke proudly say that their Buddhism is an experientially based faith, they discriminate between kinds of religious experience. Is this reasonable? Sixth, it may be noted that the more devotionally oriented Mahayana Buddhist has a place for dualism between God (or the Buddha Amitābha, etc.) and the human being, and so for the numinous experience. He might note too that the Theravada is in its practice teetering on the brink of worship. So in principle a synthesis between Christian and Buddhist ideas might become possible. Of course Buddhism is not historically anchored, in a certain sense. That I shall discuss in a later chapter. But seventh, the main weight in Buddhism has belonged with the contemplative life. Maybe there have been times in Eastern Orthodoxy when this has been so in Christianity. But generally speaking the emphasis has been more on worship and the sacramental life in mainstream Christianity. And especially in Protestantism the main emphasis has been upon the devotional life, namely *bhakti*. Michael Pye in his collection of texts called *Comparative Religion – an introduction through source materials* interestingly quotes a Methodist hymn as an instance of the expression of Christian *bhakti*:

> Jesus, Lover of my soul,
>   Let me to thy bosom fly,
> While the nearer waters roll,
>   While the tempest still is high:
> Hide me, O my saviour, hide,
>   Till the storm of life be past!
> Safe into the haven guide,
>   O receive my soul at last![8]

In brief, there is between most of mainstream Buddhism and a great part of mainstream Christianity a gulf of priorities. Contemplation is nearly always central to Buddhist practice: it is often peripheral to Christian practice. Eighth, the surrounding ideas in the two religions do of course make a difference to the mysticism. Rebirth, karma, the non-historical nature of the

Bodhisattva ideal, the notion of nirvana – these compete against resurrection, grace, the historical Jesus, the notion of atonement, the goal of reconciliation with God.

But we can already see that there are overlaps and complementarities. I shall be discussing these later. In conclusion, my phenomenology is speculative but possible. If true, then the schema says something profoundly important across cultures. For instance, mystics might well think (as some indeed already think) that the conceptual and other differences count for little.

5 Hua-yen Buddhism and Modern Japanese Thought

Both T'ien-t'ai and Ch'ān were fine Chinese achievements. The third vital philosophy characteristic of the Buddhist development of a Chinese face is Hua-yen. Its spirit is strangely echoed in a small poem by Goethe:

> Müsset im Naturbetrachten
> Immer eins wie alles achten:
> Nichts is drinnen, nichts ist draussen;
> Denn was innen, das ist aussen.
> So ergreifet ohne Saümnis
> Heilig öffentlich Geheimnis.
> Freuet euch das wahren Scheins,
> Euch der ernsten Spieles:
> Kein Lebendiges ist ein Eins,
> Immer ists ein Vieles.[1]

'In exploring nature, always look at each thing and the whole; nothing is inside and nothing outside, for what is within is without. Hurry then to grasp this holy open secret. Rejoice in the true illusion, in the earnest game. No living being is a single thing, it is always a many.'

Hua-yen well expresses the 'organismic philosophy' which Joseph Needham sees as characteristic of Chinese scientific thought – the organic interconnectedness of things.[2] It inherits from Indian sources the central image of the jewel-net of Indra in which each jewel reflects every other: but it is typically more positive in its interpretation of interdependency than Indian Buddhism was. While it denies substantiality it has a warmer, more affirmative attitude to the constitutive elements or events which make up the world.

The Indian concept of *pratītyasamutpāda*, sometimes translated

'dependent origination', has two sides to it. One side consists in the affirmation that everything is causally dependent on something else. The other side has a particular configuration, since the traditional teaching listed twelve links in the chain of conditions. So ignorance breeds dispositions (to be reborn), which affect consciousness, which conditions individual bodily existence, which conditions the six sense-fields, which condition contact, which brings about feelings, which produce craving, which gives rise to grasping, which causes becoming, which gives rise to birth, which is the prelude to decay and death. There has been a lot of dispute about why these things are listed: maybe it is two or more lists which have become conflated into one.

The chain appears chiefly to describe the conditions in an individual which bind her to the round of rebirth (or redeath), and sometimes is interpreted to span two lives. But at any rate we can discern the more general and the more particular sides to the idea of *pratītyasamutpāda*. Now the first side, to do with the causal or conditional dependency of everything, was usually taken in the Indian tradition to mean that every particular event or *dharma* has no *svabhāva* – no 'own-being'. Every particular was in this sense empty, insubstantial. The Lesser Vehicle and the Theravada in particular were sometimes criticised because though they admitted that things are empty in that they are composed of swarms of *dharmas*, they did not say that the *dharmas* themselves were empty. But in the Indian Great Vehicle this step was taken and the reason was that each *dharma* was conditioned by others and was therefore relative to them, and without *svabhāva*. So the *dharmas* themselves were empty. In this way the universe dissolves into a kind of ethereal powder. But this Mahayana view was itself modified in the Hua-yen. For it could be seen as too negative. A middle position was demanded.

So far we have noted two themes in Buddhism – the idea that there is a particular chain of causation which looks at conditioned reality from the perspective of the individual; and the notion that everything is empty, because conditioned and relative. A third consideration comes into play when it is seen that ordinary language in describing things as though these truths did not exist contains illusions. Or to put the matter a different way, our conceptual apparatus, projected onto the process of the world in and around us, is misleading. This idea of the cloud of ignorance that besets us because we are in the thrall of concepts

is also a vital motif in the Mahayana picture of the world. Though it is present in the Hua-yen worldview it is not so prominent as in Zen.

The Hua-yen vision emphasises the positive side of the second of the above motifs. It sees the interconnectedness of things as a sign of emptiness, yes: but more important it sees it as a golden web holding the cosmos together. It thus represents a middle position. This was emphasised in a famous sermon preached by the chief Hua-yen theoretician Fa-tsang (643–712) at the imperial palace. This was given in 699 and is recorded in a small work called 'The Golden Lion'. He used as illustration the golden lion statue in the palace. The gold of the figure represented the *li* or principle which underlines phenomena, and the phenomena were exemplified by the lion shape. When one can look at the object before one in a fresh way both sides are annihilated. Both beauty and ugliness disappear and the mind stays calm. This is a liberating vision – enlightenment.

Each element or *dharma* in the cosmos displays, according to Fa-tsang, six characteristics – particularity and universality; similarity and difference; and disintegration and integration. Each of these polarities is supposed to imply the other. Within this structure, each event mirrors every other.

There is in all this a contrast to a picture which in other ways might remind us of Hua-yen – the worldview of Leibniz. There each thing is programmed, so to speak, by a pre-established harmony, and fits in therefore with every other thing in the universe. But these monads are windowless. They are sealed off from mutual conditioning. The whole universe is a fantastic scheme of providential ordering. But in Hua-yen the events are open to one another: moreover there is a mutual penetration between the particular and the universal (and so with the other polarities).

Following a main theme in the Wisdom Literature, Fa-tsang uses the notion of the *Tathatā* or Suchness – the inexpressible absolute which, so to speak, underlies phenomena. Because of the characteristically non-dual nature of the higher mystical experience in Buddhism and also because conceptual distinctions have to be overcome once we realise the artificial and purely pragmatic nature of our conceptual systems, the Buddha in his vision becomes identical with (or better, is identical with) Suchness. His nature is Suchness. We might put this in Western

terminology by saying that the Buddha *is* the absolute. This is extended to all living and other beings. Since they are all penetrated by the light of Suchness they are all – as the Sanskrit expression signifies – wombs of the Thus-gone, that is wombs of the Buddha. Or to put it another way, we all possess the Buddha-nature.

This also helps us to understand why it is that the Hua-yen Buddhists represent the absolute as Vairocana, the great Buddha of illumination. The centre of Kegon (that is, Hua-yen) Buddhism in Japan is the great Todaiji temple in Nara in Japan. This is dominated by the enormous statue of Vairocana, more than fifty feet high. From the halo round his head emanate countless other Buddhas. He holds his hand up in the well-known gesture which means 'Have no fear'. Perhaps I can pause here for a moment to reflect on life in Nara, ancient capital of Japan and sacred city.

The old part of Nara lies on one side, divided from the main inhabited region of the city. I stood one day on Mikasa hill from which you can see the old and the new. Below me on one side was a lovely lake with a delicate pavilion in its midst. Upwards there stretched the wooden flank of the mountain. Further down was the great Todaiji temple and various others. There were parks stretching about the sacred, well-swept buildings. A road penetrated across to the new city. In the park were strolling folk and many a nimble deer. The deer had been introduced in recent times to remind the pious of the deer park where the Buddha first revealed his teaching (teachings which only partially disclosed his vision, which in full form – as we have noted already – is expressed through the Hua-yen system). The scene had great peace and a certain nice solemnity, partially disturbed by the cars and buses pouring along the road. Indeed to get across the best way, I found, was to shelter behind a deer or two: the drivers stopped for deer, but not for mere humans. In the other direction, the new city stretched, a hive of huddled buildings and small factories. I began idly to count the number of chimneys I could see. After I got to fifty I lost count. Japan's economic miracle was bought of course at a cost: the restlessness of hard-working industrial life, and the smoke emanating from the crowd of chimney-stacks. Can the two sides of life be integrated? Can Buddhist enlightenment go with technological progress and capitalistic success?

At a deeper level we may be asking how Buddhism fares in regard to the modern scientific outlook. To that question I shall return. Meanwhile I want to draw something further from the huge statue of the Buddha Vairocana. He symbolises the personal aspect of the universe, one might suppose. Does this mean that Buddhism here believes in a kind of Absolute God, incarnated in the Buddha Sakyamuni as a human manifestation of the Ultimate?

There is indeed – for all the difference of content and flavour – a certain congruence between Christian and Buddhist ideas here. If you think of the Absolute as the divine being, and of Sakyamuni as like the incarnate Son, then the notion of the Buddha-nature present in each living being has some analogy to the Holy Spirit. I need not underline the divergences, however. And we should not exaggerate the similarities.

For one thing, the West has a major tradition of thinking in terms of substances. God is a great Being, or perhaps Being itself. Such is the instinct of Western thinking since Aristotle and beyond. But the Buddhist Absolute is not a Being. It is misleading to reify it. Nevertheless, I would like to comment on a crucial way of looking at it. Here I quote a remark made by Francis H. Cook in his pioneering book *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*:

> Although it may seem that the absolute cannot be both transcendental and immanent, it is in fact both. The word 'transcendental' only seems to conflict with the immanence of the absolute, but this is because we who were raised in the Western tradition usually conceive of the transcendental nature of the absolute as raising it beyond the world of nature, so that there is a true gulf, forever unremovable, between the absolute and the phenomenal or relative. The Western god does not abide in his creation, and it is a heresy to locate him in it . . . The very idea of immanence raises the specter of that pantheism which is so abhorred by the great Western monotheistic religions, and which they regard as the mark of a 'lower' religion.[3]

I think there is a difference between the Mahayana and the West in these matters, but I am not sure whether Cook locates it correctly. Of course he is right up to a point, because many Westerners who have not thought through the problem do think

of God as outside of creation as if they knew what 'outside' might mean here. The issues are important, not just in themselves but because they relate to the way in which the two Naras can live together.

In the next chapter I am going to go more deeply into questions of the relation between religion and modern science: but I can give a trailer here. That has to do with the way in which many of the conflicts arise from an overliteral interpretation of religious language. This is why the Dionysian negative theology is a useful warning. The overliteralism is already illustrated from the very idea of 'outside', whenever we think that God is *outside* or *beyond* the cosmos. Incidentally the two very impressive latinate words 'transcendent' and 'immanent' only dress up the words 'beyond' as in *trans-* and 'inside' as in *im-*.

Now I think a moment's reflection will let us see that the words 'beyond' or 'outside' are not used literally in the case of God or the absolute. If I say that Stanley lies beyond the Aberdeen Tunnel, what I assert is that Stanley lies in a bit of space on the other side of the Tunnel. But if God lies beyond the cosmos then she is scarcely to be thought of as in a bit of space lying on the other side of space. If she were she would be in space. So to say that God transcends space must be a metaphor or analogy. Of course, some might argue that my argument merely demonstrates that the idea of God contains a contradiction if she is supposed to be transcendent, once you have unclothed the simple meaning of the idea. Such a judgment insists on taking the space-words literally. But why should we? There are plenty of analogical uses of language both in science and in everyday life. An electric current does not flow in quite the way water flows (or electricity would keep leaking out of the socket). There is curvature of space, but it is not quite curved in the way we literally think of curves. So there is no hindrance to our thinking that God is non-literally beyond space.

Part of what this means is that God is not a spatial being. So we cannot ask how tall she is or how fat. More than that, the idea of transcendence implies (in the Western tradition) that even if the cosmos did not exist, God would. That is, her existence is not dependent on that of the cosmos. On the contrary it is held that the existence of the cosmos depends upon that of God. In brief, God is creator of the world. Here a difference with the Buddhist absolute emerges, which I shall return to.

Rather similar remarks apply to the idea of immanence. We might wish to say that God is in all things. That is, God works in all the cosmos. The trouble with the picture of God's being outside the cosmos is that it draws attention away from the supposed living presence of God in the world. God is not just supreme creator but the sustainer of the world – the preservation of the world is what Augustine labelled 'continuous creation'. So one function of saying that God is immanent in the cosmos is to remind us of her continuous activity in and through the processes of the world. But again, 'in' is not to be taken literally. If I say that there is cheese in the refrigerator I mean that in a bit of space within the larger space occupied by the refrigerator there is to be found a piece of cheese. But, in this sense, God is not in the world. He or she is not to be discovered by cutting open a tree trunk, even if in some sense she is in the tree trunk. Nor is she in Kowloon in particular, though Kowloon is in the cosmos.

There is, though, a sentimental rhyme, which says that you are closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth. I think this means that God manifests herself more clearly in a garden than in, say, an airport runway. There are certain manifest qualities in a garden that are redolent of the divine – the peace, the naturalness, the beauty. It is of course quite possible that some things in the world may be more revelatory of the divine than others even if God is equally behind them all – just as the small of my back is undoubtedly part of me though my face is more expressive of *me*, in my personal being, than is the small of my back. Perhaps a mime of genius could make her back eloquent, but even so the face is the most revelatory piece of the body, in nearly all circumstances.

We may also note another factor in the usual picture of God as transcendent. We think of God as being beyond the cosmos as though the world is a kind of screen. It is a screen that may not be utterly opaque. The flashes here and there of the signs of God's creativity and presence are like flecks of light shining through the screen. But God is invisible and mysterious, and for the most part concealed from us. That is no doubt why we may think of God's revelation as a kind of unveiling (which is what it means): normally she is unseen but here and there she is manifested to us. This metaphor of the screen or veil goes with the numinous experience. As Otto says, God is a *mysterium*. Just as in rites we often screen off the place of holy rituals (this is very

evident in Orthodox practice), so we think of the Holy One as being behind the screen of the world. She is the Other, beyond the created world.

Now if we turn back to the question of the Mahayana absolute or Suchness, we find that some parts of the Western implications of transcendence apply and others do not. It is very clear from Fa-tsang's commentaries that there is no question of the absolute existing even if the cosmos does not. If we sum up a Christian claim as being: God would exist even if the cosmos did not, then this is not something which could be said of the absolute in Hua-yen (or most other schools of Buddhism). The absolute and phenomena are simply two sides of the same coin. Moreover, because of the predominantly mystical character of Buddhist experience, the metaphor of the screen hiding the numinous *mysterium* does not apply. But the non-spatial character of the absolute does apply. In this sense the absolute is both immanent and transcendent. So there is this partial comparison between God and the absolute.

For Buddhism the cosmological question, if I may call it that, is unanswerable. That is, the question as to why there is something (namely this cosmos) rather than nothing. In the West, the question has been taken much more seriously. The answer that God creates the cosmos is meant to give further light on the meaning of the existence of the cosmos. But it is of course open to anyone to reject the explanation, and make the cosmos the ultimate. This is in effect the Buddhist position. I have elsewhere treated the cosmological question in *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, in the chapter on Aquinas.[4]

So far we have noted only a partial resemblance between the Buddhist model of the world and the theistic one. There still remains the problem of why such a huge Buddha as the Vairocana at Todaiji should have been installed. The very size gives it a rather numinous quality. The slight smile on his face hints at divine bliss. What is he doing there, symbolising the absolute? Is there some secret way in which the absolute is after all personal?

I think first of all that we have here to emphasise once again the conception of the skill in means of the Buddha – a notion which suffuses so much of the Great Vehicle. We are swathed in ignorance and craving. The clouds of ignorance need to be pierced by the light. Vairocana is a symbol of that piercing. Alienated as we are from the Truth, we need images and glories

in religion to light our way. The ineffable peace which Vairocana exudes is nothing other than the absolute – or rather the absolute and phenomena fused together which is Suchness manifested. The Buddha's non-dual vision is expressed in sculpture, and this may be effective. The size of the statue arises in part because, to the alienated and ignorant folk plunged in the mirages of this world, true bliss seems like enormous holiness. It is like a stained glass window. Seen from outside it is flat, it is nothing. But seen from inside it glows with colours. Those glories may lead the worshipper to say to himself: the colours come from outside, let me go there. When he sees the sun and looks at the flat, empty window, he realises that he was beguiled, even tricked. But it was his own ignorance which did it.

From another point of view, Vairocana represents the personal side of the cosmos in so far as the Void or Empty lies at the heart of the human being. The Nothing is like a spark at the base of human consciousness. It is also the nature of the absolute with whom we have in the deepest experience a non-dual relationship (or I should say non-relationship!). The Buddha-nature lies at the heart of the world. This is the justification for personalising the absolute as the Buddha Vairocana.

There is a further reflection which I wish to undertake regarding the Hua-yen system. It gives a view which represents human individuals as well as all other entities as interconnected. This gives rise to thoughts about individuality. From one perspective Buddhism is highly individualistic, both theoretically and practically. In the institution of the Sangha it undermines the family somewhat, certainly by Indian and Chinese standards. In its critique of caste it is anti-communal. The goal of the Theravada is individual liberation. Moreover, in Mahayana the Bodhisattva ideal to save others, though collectivist in aim, is individualistic at base, for the Bodhisattva chooses of her or his own volition. Yet there is a paradox: an individualist religion preaches that the individual self does not exist.

But what does not exist is a permanent self. You are not to seek ultimate satisfaction in doing what your ego demands. The Hua-yen organismic system reminds us too of interconnectedness, which could be expressed in part as follows. We are congeries of short-lived states of different kinds (as described in the doctrine of the five *skandhas* – bodily events, feelings, sensations, dispositions and states of consciousness). But our individual

unity is also held together only by causal connections. The kinds of events are held together organically as an individual by causation. The person is a node of causation. Now from this angle we should not look at ourselves as isolated. In their different ways both Indian and Western concepts of the individuals have thought of ourselves as isolated, because of the soul, whether we speak of Sānkhya or Descartes. Even the bodies have been rather assumed to be self-subsistent. But Buddhism in making the individual a causal unity leads us to think more widely of causal relations. Thus I interact, however exiguously, with you. I have some causal effect on you, as you have with me. Some people have much greater causal impact on me than others. If I brush against someone in the Beijing underground, he has a slight effect on me. But my mother and father have huge causal effects on me, not only through genes but through upbringing. My mother thought that Mozart and Schubert were gods; my father thought Bradman and Woolley were gods. That gives me four gods already (though countersuggestibility was also important: my father was highly conservative, having risen from a poor family, but I am a libertarian). My hair, my face, my body – all are inherited causally; my culture is heavily determined by my parents. So we have greater or lesser impact on others. Because I teach I have quite strong effects on doctoral students, partly because of prevalent sycophancy (though I like them to be critical: so maybe they are sycophantly critical). Now suppose we could *see* causality like a kind of luminescent cloud. Then you would see me as a ball of tight-knit causal events – my liver, brain, skin and so on interacting merrily; but you would see outside my skin a thinning cloud of causal effects. I would be like a planet seen by an X-ray telescope. Again you would see some incoming particles of causation.

Each cloud would be an individual, from the Buddhist perspective – and especially from the Hua-yen perspective. My cloud as its edges thin out would be extended to every other cloud in the universe.

Karma theory would imply that I would have rather more effect on some particular future cloud than on others. That would be my individuality carrying on. But now of course some waverings might begin in my attitudes. My attitude to a future cloud would be no different really from my attitude to a contemporary cloud – for instance my wife. I have a lot of effect on her

just as I am greatly affected by her. Why should I think more of my future cloud than about my wife? My view even of tomorrow's Ninian Smart is merely that of all beings in the universe I have more effects on that cloud than on any other. If I plan for my future and do things selfishly it is still somehow external to my present self. Gradually Buddhism suggests that all clouds are equal. This is its metaphysical path to the dictum: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'

To return to the main ideas of Hua-yen, let me underline not only that this system was given important new values in the Chinese tradition, but also that it helped to express that organismic philosophy to which I alluded before as representing a central value in Chinese science according to Joseph Needham. It also had effects on Japanese philosophy. For instance among modern Japanese philosophers undoubtedly the greatest is Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945). His worldview, which changed somewhat in 1927, taking a more distinctively Buddhist and Japanese turn, owes something to Hua-yen (Kegon), as well as to Fichte, Bergson and Zen, and also to Schopenhauer. He envisaged a kind of field of interaction between selves and the outside world, which owes something to Kegon interactionism: within this field there are various points of departure, or *basho* – place. This neutral term also was related to the idea of Nothingness, the void which is yet full, and which is the essence of the individual before his usual self-consciousness. It is a kind of absolute, but because Nishida's slant was phenomenological and existential you are warned not to reify it. He gave expression from a modern Japanese perspective to a new philosophy which was so to speak beyond East and West. He started with Fichte and Kant and ended with the masters of the Japanese spiritual tradition.

He was the first major philosopher of the Japanese tradition to synthesise in any thorough way the thought of the West and that of the East. He heralds a new phase of philosophising, when East and West, North and South meet together. He also poses a question, about the relation of scientific to religious, aesthetic and moral values. From the perspective of Kegon and other traditional Buddhist schools there is not a great problem. Buddhism has in its own way a highly modern framework. The West has passed through much stormier times in the relations between science and religion. The Hua-yen system, for instance, emphasises the pluralism of the *dharmas*, the way in which the

cosmos is made up of huge swarms of events. This is a much more satisfactory picture than the traditional substance-based metaphysics of so much of the West. Also Buddhists have always stressed the vast scale of the universe both in space and time. Moreover the philosophy of the Buddha, as was stressed by K.N. Jayatilleke[5] above all and by some of his disciples, was in its own way empiricist and experimental. This naturally raises the question of why it is in that case that modern science arose in the West rather than in the East. The confined cosmology, the substance-based metaphysics, the dead hand of Aristotle, the lack of glasnost in medieval Europe – all these would seem to militate against the opening up of scientific enquiry. Possibly the answer lies in the sharp contradictions in Western civilisation, and the clash between Greece and Christianity during the Renaissance.

The relative absence in modern times of severe tensions between the overall cosmology of Buddhism and that of modern science may help to account for the ease with which Japan was able to take to national reconstruction, including new constitutional and educational arrangements during the miracle years of the Meiji period. Of course, Japan also enshrined into its constitution the old Shinto inheritance, revamped and organised. It did this because Buddhism and other value-systems such as Confucianism could hardly of their nature give expression, during an age of nationalism stimulated by the threat from outside, to a *kokutai* or national essence. It was intuitively apparent to the makers of the new Japan that the major irrationality of the new world was nationalism (or imperialism if chauvinist). Therefore they mobilised values from their tradition to express this nonrational aspect of a resurgent Japan. They drew on the old *kami* or gods, and called in Shinto (which was forcibly separated with some pain from Buddhism, with which it had been in a warm symbiosis) and the traditional institution of the imperial family. Amusingly, the constitution gave freedom of religion to the citizens, but Shinto, respect for which became mandatory, was declared not to be a religion!

Nishida was fond of quoting Goethe, which is why I started with him. One of his concerns was the relation of religion and science. This remains an important intellectual issue, and in the next chapter I shall deal with some aspects of the question as seen in the West.

6 New Christian Interpretations: Science, Liberalism and Religion

In general terms Buddhism, as we have hinted, was well equipped to enter into symbiosis with modern science. Its organismic philosophy and doctrine of impermanence found remarkable echoes in modern physics, while the traditional hugeness of scale in its cosmology could be simply fitted with this century's discovery of the vast swarms of galaxies, each of mind-boggling size, which fill our night sky. As for evolutionary theory and modern biology, the doctrine of rebirth gives Buddhists a sense of kinship with monkeys. It is true that there are discrepancies and problems with traditional affirmations. The eight causes of earthquakes (for instance, they occur when a Buddha reaches enlightenment and passes away) would not be taken seriously in California today, though they are expounded in the Sutta of the Great Decease (*Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta*). Again, there are questions about how modern genetics fits in with karma theory. But on the whole the spirit of early Buddhism and its vision of the world blends easily with the mood and scope of modern science. It was possible to make a lively apologia for Buddhism along these lines, as was done for example by K.N. Jayatilleke, one of Theravada Buddhism's ablest philosophers and scholars, in his *The Message of the Buddha*.

Christianity was liable to have greater difficulties adjusting to modern knowledge. The wonderful synthesis excogitated by St Thomas Aquinas and others gave the medieval Church a seemingly powerful worldview, which continued in Catholicism until the Aggiornamento of John XXIII. Much of the medieval cosmology continued too among the Reformers. Orthodoxy remained content with the earlier blend with NeoPlatonism. But the cosmology had severe defects. First, it was based on the metaphysics of things, substances: by the end of the 19th Century and the work of Einstein, Rutherford and others substances

had vanished into clouds of events. Second, the world-picture, derived from the thinking of the Hebrew Bible (revamped as the Old Testament), was terribly narrow. The earth was at the centre. Above was heaven and below was hell. Even when Newton provided a different physics, building on the work among others of Copernicus and Galileo, the universe was still small and heliocentric. Moreover, *Genesis* taken woodenly could easily collide with Darwin's evolutionary theory. Though resistance to that theory was as much a matter of scientists' opposition as that of churchmen, there was quite a lot in Christian sentiment to fuel such a quarrel. Christianity had made a sharp distinction between human beings, made in the image of God, and animals (note how the latter word typically refers to non-human beings). The former had souls and the latter did not. Besides, there were deeper darker vibrations where sex was concerned, and often physical love was depicted as something 'animal'.

These tensions between religion and science are not in the last resort a severe problem, provided that you adopt a liberal stance. But that itself creates insecurities for some Christians. Moreover, liberalism in theology was associated with another trend in the 19th Century: that of applying newly conceived historical techniques born mainly out of the post-Hegelian ambience of great German research universities to the scriptures. Secular scepticism and probings had come to roost upon the dignified authority of the beautifully printed Biblical page. The inevitable result of the liberal-historical thrust was to suggest that quite a number of Biblical statements were wrong, at least about science and such matters. Paul might be right about grace, but you don't have to follow him in his cosmology. *Genesis* might be right about the dependence of the cosmos upon the Lord, but was no guide to the details of how the universe developed, or this planet. Historical probing made certain assumptions, for instance to discount most or all supposed miracles. It also quested for the sources of the Gospels and other narratives. From this came some general agreements – for instance about a source called Q.

All this, of course, raised some deep questions about Biblical authority. If you accepted the relative scepticism of the historical method, then where could you draw the line? Was it perhaps not better to reject much or all of the new approaches? The varied forms of what we rather loosely call 'fundamentalism' express

such a backlash. The point is to preserve the authority of the Bible and of suitable born-again interpreters. However, it would I think be wrong to look at relations between religion and science too narrowly in the modern period. In fact, in the great dialectic of modern Western history since the Reformation, certain changes have occurred in the fabric of the way in which Christianity has been organised and conceived which have had a number of major effects. It would be useful to set this broader scene, and I shall do so by considering the tensions and their outcome from the perspective of the seven dimensions of religion. Broadly speaking what I shall be sketching are changes which have happened above all in the 19th and 20th Centuries, though their roots reach further back. I shall schematise the changes, which are never simple, as being constituted in each case by a major and a minor form, sometimes in contradiction with one another.

First, let us consider what has happened in regard to the ritual dimension of Christianity. Despite the remarkable effects of the Anglo-Catholic revival in England and some other English-speaking countries during the latter part of the 19th Century, the trend has been overwhelmingly towards the simplification of rituals, and to their being more direct and expressive in impact. This was something already well launched by the Reformation. It is something which was crowned in Catholicism through the changes wrought by Vatican II (1962–5). The recognition of the importance of expressing rites through vernacular languages had of course already been long pioneered in national churches and the general Protestant movement. In Calvinist churches the emphasis had been upon the sermon, and this too has come to shrink in formality and weight. It is not usually realised that under Calvinist influence the Church of England still made hymns illegal through to 1820. The shape of modern worship belongs very much to the last two centuries. The evolution of such a shape comes in great part from a desire to give religion a more expressive tone, and this in turn reflects a greater importance assigned to religious experience, to which we shall come. So the major trend in the ritual dimension can be seen as *simplification*.

The minor trend has accompanied organisational changes in many countries, and that is the privatisation of most ritual. It is true that there remain countries where the separation of Church and State has not been clarified. But effectively the separation

has occurred, in part because of the development of separate secular and national rituals – the national anthem, the calendar of national holidays, the pomp surrounding the ruler and so forth. In general, Christianity has retreated, though not usually quite the whole way, into a group of associations important to their members, but not integrated into public events fully. So the minor trend is: *privatisation*.

These alterations are consequent upon organisational changes in part. The main effects of the Reformation were twofold. First, there was the establishment of national Churches, ranging from Lutheranism in Sweden to the Church of England, the Church of Scotland and lastly State Catholicism in Poland and elsewhere. The second was the proliferation of 'leftwing' Protestant denominations – Anabaptists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers and so on. In the United States matters were more complicated still, for the old national groups, such as Swedish Lutherans, effectively became further denominations in the rich fabric of 19th Century immigrant America. That American example has become the norm: modern Christianity is a rich range of denominations, moderated by the ecumenical movement. In the Third World, especially in Africa, a whole new crop of Christian or partly Christian movements has emerged, trying to express the faith in terms of underlying African and other relevant values. Broadly speaking we may look on the major trend in organisation as being the *denominationalisation* of Christianity, which reflects a decay of centralised authority and the fitting of Christianities into the more plural structure of the modern nation state. At the same time, in the 20th Century a certain force in ecumenism has been apparent, and with it a backlash among various groups of a broadly fundamentalist cast. In other words a new main division has begun to emerge, between the mainline denominations which in one way or another are broadly liberal in tone, and fundamentalist groups and new religions which stay out of the mainline structure. We may call this second trend the *non-mainline backlash*.

All this broadly reflects the changing position of Christianity within the forms of nationalism that have come to dominate the scene in Europe first of all, and in the rest of the world since World Wars I and II. Of course in a number of Western countries Christianity had its pretensions to patriotic virtue: for which reason, among others, the religion failed with enough clarity to

resist the hyper-nationalism of the Nazis, of which anti-Semitism was the most deadly fruit.

The denominationalisation of Christianity reflects problems with authority. These are partly to do with the coming of the national secular State, with its own religious atmosphere and a desire to control education. They are also to do with the inevitable consequences of the knowledge revolution which had been going on since at least the Enlightenment. A more open and liberal questioning of received wisdom, whether in the sciences or in ethics and religion, was bound to weaken religious authority. Many States moreover during the 19th Century were keen to draw on the resources provided by the sciences, which in turn seemed to depend upon a widening of educational opportunities. Toleration of minority groups was important in this new liberal atmosphere, and this contributed to the erosion of State-supported authority.

Yet the Christian faith still needed some locus of authority. One such locus was in a transnational source – the Papacy (which was why the Papacy held on tenaciously against such dangerous trends as Roman Catholic Modernism, finally giving way in Vatican II). Another locus lay in a combination of traditional ecclesiastical structures backed by Biblical and other sources. Thus the Church of England could hang on to its rather relaxed pluralism by having a Parliament-guaranteed Prayer Book plus an appeal to the Bible and early Councils of the Church. But for many denominations there had to be some more basic locus of authority. For many this was the Bible, of course. But this was subject to questions too. The Bible was often seen as being not just the book but the book in dialectic with religious experience: conversion, being born again, dramatic inner conviction. This was one way in which Protestant emphasis in particular was shifted towards appeal to spiritual experience (but note too Roman Catholic pentecostalism).

This brings us to the experiential dimension. It is notable that both immediately after the main wave of the Enlightenment and during the aftermath of the 19th Century critique of religion there should have been two major thinkers who emphasised religious experience – namely Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto. The logic of the latter's position was strong: in the sense that appeal to experience had to be a vital ingredient in establishing faith. It happened that Otto's influence on Protestantism was a

good deal less than might have been expected because his work was overtaken by the vigorous Biblicism of Karl Barth. But by the 1960s interest in religious experience had greatly revived. In particular there was interest in mystical experience and practices of meditation. This was out of step with the main Protestant emphasis (more upon the numinous and devotional feeling), but it led to an opening to the East especially among Catholic writers such as Thomas Merton,[1] William Johnson,[2] Heinrich Dumoulin[3] and others. Meanwhile, in the 1970s there came an experientially-based revivalism in the United States in particular, emphasising the experience of being 'born again'. It may be noted that some of the deeper problems associated with the diversity of types of religious experience remain unresolved: how should one weight the inexpressible experiences of the mystics against the profound sense of turning among the converts, and the sense of the presence of God in so many forms of theism?

It may also be noted that the emphasis on experience tends towards individualism. It is true that mysticism usually occurs within the structure of either monasticism or a guru-system, and this moderates individualism. But the stress in Protestantism has for long been on the decision of the individual (hence the repudiation of infant baptism). Experiential faith moreover becomes a credential of truth. This furthers the privatisation of religion. But it is often the case in the West that experience is regarded as an adjunct to something more objective – 'out there'. In particular, it is often joined intensely to Biblical faith. So we may see the major trend in the West as being towards increased emphasis on *devotional experience*. The more minor trend is the *exploration of mysticism*, especially Eastern.

Regarding the ethical dimension, and matters of social and political value, Christianity could scarcely be untouched by the profound problems created by the industrial revolution, urbanisation, the development of capitalism and the rise of socialist ideas. It happens that Marxism was profoundly at odds with traditional religions, which have been persecuted to a greater or lesser extent in Marxist countries from Eastern Europe to North Korea, and in Cuba, Ethiopia, South Yemen and elsewhere. But Christian denominations were also much involved with the development of social democratic ideas, which have played a crucial role in the creation of the modern welfare state, combining capitalist wealth-creation and socialist compassion and ideals of

social justice. But at the same time Christian values were often identified with nationalism, and hyper-nationalist right-wing governments and movements often claimed Christian support – from Franco's Fascism to the Romanian Garda de Fer. More recently, liberation theology, with its blend of Marxist and Christian values, has been influential. But on the whole Christian social attitudes have helped to reinforce liberal and social democratic positions, with a backlash of strong religious conservatism both in the United States and elsewhere. So we may say that the major trend in regard to values has been for Christian to help in the *reinforcement of liberal and social democratic policies* among mainline Churches; and elsewhere the minor trend is towards a *conservative backlash.*

The pluralist milieu of the typical modern nation-State has reinforced a realisation which the fragmentation of Christianity into denominations has helped to create – namely that dogmas may be held with certitude but can hardly be publicly proved. A softening of Christian epistemology has occurred. This has been accompanied by severe problems over the narrative dimension, above all in the matter of Biblical criticism. The German universities of the 19th Century pioneered the new use of historical methods to probe the text of the Bible and other documents relevant to Christian origins and the heritage of Israel. It is greatly to the credit of the Protestant faculties of theology in German and other institutions of higher education that they got involved in a most profound self-criticism within the Church. For it was quite obvious that the new milieu of investigation, treating sacred texts as historical documents in a reasonably scientific fashion, was bound to be charged with the electricity of doubt and questioning. If so, how long could the texts really remain sacred? The details do not matter here. But if you use strictly historical canons are you not bound to doubt many of the miracles? Are you not bound to be sceptical about the veracity of much that is written in the Gospels, at least as historical truth? A very different slant from that of traditional Biblical exegesis will supervene. Now in certain ways the historical method leaves many Biblical images and values untouched. The major portion of Paul's analysis of Christ's role in redemption is left unchanged, although subtle changes will occur with an alteration of cosmological perspective due to contemporary astronomical knowledge. The new ways of dealing with the text will reinforce

the conviction that much of the Biblical material is allegorical, analogical or metaphorical in character. It has been typical for theologians to affirm themes rather than details in the narrative dimension of Christianity. This at least is true of mainline theologians. The backlash among so-called fundamentalists is to literalise much of the Biblical material and to reject portions of the modern scientific outlook which clash with some main (literally conceived) Biblical teachings.

Thus the notable clash, expressed most vividly in the debate between Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford and T.H. Huxley,[4] between evolutionists and certain clerics and churchpersons was essentially to do with the use of modern methods of dealing with the Bible. The collision between religion and science was incidental to this. The fact is that the new biology and later the new astronomy could well be combined with the historical method. For the interpretation of the sacred documents could always occur *sub specie scientatis*. This admittedly requires a division between spiritual and scientific truths: the Bible being thought profoundly right about the former and naturally dated about the latter. As for such theories as evolution – why, they reflect God's methods of bringing humankind into being, making us natural outgrowths of the living world, itself a natural outgrowth of the non-living world. The new perspective involves some changes in theodicy, of course. The detail of how God shapes the world is not without perspectival force. But there is no reason why new discoveries in scientific cosmology should not be incorporated into the Biblical narrative. Although there has been a good deal of fudging and foot-dragging, the liberal interpretation of the Bible has in fact done this, seeing the cosmology in the Bible as secondary and adventitious.

It of course means that a certain kenosis has to be ascribed to the Holy Spirit as well as to Christ. In case anyone believes that the writers of the Bible were filled not just with spiritual knowledge but an uncanny understanding of biology and physics, it is affirmed (from a liberal perspective) that the authors of the Bible though inspired were human (all-too-human), and so naturally enough ignorant of modern biology, astronomy and so forth. Biblical books are not texts in science, or even in history as contemporarily understood. Any other view would be anachronistic.

In all this modern interpreters are, after all, doing much the same as Aquinas and others did. The author of *Job* knew nothing

of Aristotle, nor did the writer of John's Gospel have any proleptic knowledge of Neo-Platonism. But both Aristotle and Neo-Platonism are ingredients in Aquinas' worldview. Now we have turned our back on most of Aristotle's science and metaphysics, and new concepts are needed to describe the world. It is the job of the Christian community to keep updating its perspective on the cosmos in the light of both modern knowledge and traditional narrative.

So then the main trend, that is in mainline Christianity, regarding the narrative dimension, is *liberal and critical*. Sometimes the trend has been imperfectly expressed. For instance, while Karl Barth incorporated liberal and critical values into his theology, his narrow vision of Christ as the Word, in a manner ignoring other religions, had an undesirably conservative perspective inside its liberal clothing. It is not that a generally conservative view is necessarily false, if by conservative be meant evangelical. But you cannot take on board modern methods and cosmology and ignore the comparative study of religion, which remains a vital challenge to some traditionally held Christian positions. The point is that Barth's idea that Christ is over against religion, which is a human creation and a product of human response and projection, can easily be matched by a Buddhist reply in similar vein: the scriptures and religion are human creations, but they point beyond themselves to gleaming Suchness. Suchness and Christ stay on the higher level of truth, but remain (apparently) rival accounts of that higher truth. You cannot eliminate conflict by promoting your central focus to a higher division, because the other person's central focus will also be promoted, and the ballet will start again in the upper division.

Anyway, as I have said, the trend in mainline Christianity has been liberal and critical. But outside the mainline there is a parallel *backlash*, which deals with the liberal-historical mode of interpretation by rejecting it. There are variations here. Some people in the backlash take a semi-critical position. But essentially the backlash position has little, save adventitiously, to do with modern methods of science and scholarship. The rejection of criticism of the Bible is to safeguard a certain sort of authority. It seeks objectivity as the dialectical counterpart of inner faith. It finds this objectivity by projecting faith outward on to the very texts that 'guarantee' it. It is a rejection of the epistemological logic of liberal scholarship: nothing can be guaranteed – all is

doubt. But doubt does not preclude faith; it accompanies it. It does not preclude commitment, but makes it a gamble. But all this is really (in my opinion) in accord with the deeper meaning of faith in Christ. Let Thomas be our patron saint.

We move now to the doctrinal dimension. With the fading of Barthian exclusivism and the revival of Catholic theology, through such figures as Rahner[5] and Küng[6] (maverick though he be), the dominant motifs are varieties of liberal theology. There is as a subtext the reverberating theme of liberation theology (with the current crumbling of mainstream Marxism, this kind of Christianity is bound to become more liberal, overcoming its slight fascination with revolutionary regimes). Generally speaking, theologies have been highly metaphysical, underpinning the historical events by a means of indicating their transcendent aspect. It has been a major theme throughout Christian history to feel dissatisfied with the bare recital of history, and to give it depth via the metaphysical. Perhaps this theme is even more pronounced in recent times because the effect of liberal investigations is to thin out the mysterious side to the events described. The force of modern historical methods is to slice the mythic into pure event on the one hand and meaning on the other: that meaning increasingly gets supplied by the metaphysical depth which some philosophy provides.

This reinforces the epistemological softness of Christian claims. Faith has to attach itself to public claims that are doubly open to doubt. One part of doubt arises because of Christianity's rivals. Who knows which myth is true? And the other part arises from the fragility of any metaphysical underpinning that we may choose to bring out the depth of the narrative.

When Christianity of one sort or another was dominant in European countries it had the unfortunate effect of deluding populations that its epistemology was much harder than it actually is. It was not unnatural, though highly mistaken, for Luther to think that his theory of the Old Testament, namely that every passage essentially pointed to Christ, was obvious, so that Jews, in rejecting it, were guilty of wilful ignorance (all this was of course a factor in the development of anti-Semitism). Also, the epistemological hardness alleged was taken as a justification for the straight teaching of Christianity in schools, as if it were an agreed part of the body of knowledge like Newtonian physics. Actually the latter was itself subject to deep correction.

Indeed, we need to take a much more sceptical attitude to all supposed knowledge even in the sciences than we often do. How much softer is the epistemology of religions, or value-systems, etc.! And where there is softness there is legitimate doubt and where there is doubt there should be openness and pluralism in the presentation of the content of education.

It is clear that the softness of religious epistemology puts more weight upon personal commitment and therefore upon the experiential dimension. There are other places, however, where the weight can be distributed: for instance upon organisation. A strong feeling of community or powerful Church tradition can give ballast to the softer liberal claims.

In brief, then, in the doctrinal dimension we see a tendency to both softness and the metaphysical – in other words, *soft metaphysics*. But this is accompanied by a kind of *narrative hardness* as part of the scriptural backlash.

Finally, the material dimension has indeed undergone its changes in this century, such as the relative simplification of church buildings together with an ecumenical convergence. But they are not particularly important changes from the perspective of our present analysis.

Anyway, it is within the broader picture of the tendencies which I have listed above that we can see the relation of religion and science. The simplification and privatisation of ritual no doubt helps a symbiosis between religion and the secular in a modern technologically-oriented society, since it undermines those rituals which might be held to be superstitious, that is which could imply unscientific attitudes. As for the denominationalisation of Christianity, this fits in with a growing perception of the fragile character of all theory. Similar messages could be carried by the liberal and critical approaches to religious narrative. In general, the changes in the mainline which we have noted bring religion into consonance with the rest of knowledge.

Yet what would make us espouse the Christian story? Or any other? I think that there have to be reasons, but we should note that the reasons can never be decisive. A certain worldview is presented – of a Creator who makes a world which, though lifeless at first, grows life within it; of a humanity which is self-conscious and rational, and in some sense in the image of the Creator, and which grows out of the living world, through an evolutionary process; of an alienation which becomes conscious

between humanity and its dimly-perceived Lord; of how God becomes human in order to overcome that alienation and lead humankind to ever higher values; of some future consummation of whose shape we have only the dimmest conception. Such is the worldview in bare bones. It is quite obvious that the story has many enigmas in it and that it can have no proof. For instance, that the world is created is merely a supposition.

The grounds for belief in the worldview are, however, vividly present to the faithful. First, belief in Christ is a matter of experience. This may have many strands to it. There is the sense of conversion; there is the devotional awareness of the loving Lord; there may be in the depths of the soul an encounter with the ineffable; there is the continuous sense of the presence of God; there are the wonders of the world; there is a sense of how various parts of the Bible ring true in everyday living. Second, there are more metaphysical arguments. For instance, though there is no proof of the creation, it does answer a question: Why does something exist, namely the cosmos, rather than nothing? It places the cosmos in a wider context, and gives it a different meaning. Third, there is the pragmatic test: faith makes me a better, more power-laden individual. More generally, despite its manifest faults, the Christian faith has helped to shape a wonderful civilisation. But either these or analogous arguments could be used to ground Buddhism, or Islam, etc.

One subsidiary ground that I feel strongly about the Christian tradition has a relation to modern science. Christianity, in its liberal form, has had the courage to be self-critical. This is part of the key to a scientific outlook: the need to search for new concepts which might overthrow old theories, the relentless search for data which may supply counter-evidence to received views, and so on. As Popper has rightly argued, the open society is necessary for the full flowering of science. Religion can be no exception to this, save of course that refutations are softer and evidences are more shadowy. Nevertheless, a self-critical view is important. Consider for instance in recent times how the feminist critique of traditional religious language has awoken many Christians from a lethargic acceptance of male metaphors as somehow directly descriptive. We knew in our bones all along that God has no body and so has no gender.

Part of the modern critique of Christianity is cultural. Its forms are too enmeshed in the Western values it has helped to

form. This is why the last twenty years or more have seen varieties of Asian theology, Black theology, African theology, Latin American theology and so on. The centre of gravity of the Christian faith has moved south, and its future lies beyond the European and North American bases of its past glories.

All this requires not just a synthesis between faith and a modern world outlook, but a reassessment of the historical past. One of the major defects of a great deal of Christian thinking about history has been to leave a gap between the early, or at least the patristic, Church and modern times. For the Christian, history is the place of unfolding revelation, and so Christians need to conceive of the history of their movement as something continuous, which has many lessons to teach them. It was Hegel's great power that he provided a schematic way of looking at the past which gave it a rhythm and meaning. In many ways his dialectic was, of course, far too tidy: but the Christian needs too to see something of the divine meaning of the often tragic events which have shaped the world. This will have many points where self-criticism of the tradition needs to be generated. Christianity is often still heir to illusions handed down from history.

The upshot of my general argument in this chapter is that a form of liberal Christianity is the mainstream. Liberalism is gathering great strength because it has permeated the very fabric of the Catholic Church. If it yet has to make much headway among the Orthodox, this is largely because so much of that Church is in captivity. All this means that there is a natural alliance between the Christian faith and the liberal forms of modern society. It can live at peace within America, in India, and contemporary Japan, and many parts of the South Pacific, and Zimbabwe.

But a vital lesson of the very doctrine of creation which lies as a major root of the Christian and other faiths is that the divine Being is transcendent. This itself means that the Christian, in sharing the divine life through the sacraments, has one foot in heaven. She is a citizen of two worlds, of two cities – the city of heaven and the city of this world. As such Christianity – while not at all needing to be world-negating, even if starving monks and sour Calvinists have sometimes made the earth seem deadly – has a point of criticism of the world. The practical meaning of God's transcendence lies in part in a readiness to critique the

world. There cannot be absolutely loving alliance between Church and State. (In my view it was always a mistake, such solidarity between government and religion, in the East as in the West.)

Having a heavenly anchorage should also empower Christians and others to express themselves boldly where they feel society has drifted into grave errors. But there has to be openness internally within the Christian community, so that by internal debate the values of the community can be sifted. There are of course no guarantees that critical attitudes are right, and the only path is painfully to carry on, hoping that we become clearer about the stupidities and cruelties of society and of the Church itself.

The net result of all this is to see modern Christianity as a blend between two traditions or worldviews. On the one hand there is the Christian tradition as it has been handed down: on the other that liberal humanism which has evolved in the context of the modern democratic State, and which has pioneered the protection of the poor through the mechanisms of welfare and other semi-socialist means. This is not to say that Christianity is uncritical of liberal humanism itself. It is sometimes practised within the walls of ethnic exclusivism (e.g. in an Australia excluding the aborigines) or with other forms of unequal practice (e.g. the inferior chances of women), or having an illiberal policy towards other countries (e.g. the U.S.A. often in relation to Latin America), or tolerating demeaning poverty in its midst (e.g. contemporary Britain), or limiting dissent (e.g. Zimbabwe), or not combating casteism with sufficient vigour (e.g. India).

In brief, this is my sketch of how mainline Christianity forms a blend between its traditional affirmations and the values of a modern humanism which incorporates the values of science and openness.[7] Let me refer to some people and elements in the Christian past which have helped towards such open Christianity: scholars such as Origen and Augustine in opening the faith up to Hellenistic philosophy; Eckhart and Teresa of Avila in working from the depths of the individual self; Luther, for questioning solidified power; the Anabaptists for fighting for individual decision in religion; the Congregationalists for pioneering internal Christian democracy; Anglicanism for evolving its own relative toleration and pluralism; George Fox, for bringing conscience to the fore; Wilberforce for repudiating slavery; Baur,

Strauss and other German scholars for pioneering Christian historical criticism; the founding fathers of the United States for their libertarian perspective and separation of Church and State; the Scottish Presbyterian tradition for valuing modern education . . . and so on. On the other side, we have to remember tyrannical motifs in Christianity: Saint John Chrysostom and Luther's antisemitism; Cromwell's treatment of the Irish; Papal suppression of Catholic modernism; various Christian links with Fascism . . . and so on.

The liberal perspective will ultimately provide a framework for a world order. I believe in the ultimate victory of pluralism, for it is the only way in which humans can express themselves with openness and reduce the tensions which ravage societies. But there are many obstacles. The most serious of these are the problems of different races and ethnicities living together. Humanity is ravaged with groupism: the despising of other groups and group paranoia. It is because, in part, many traditional Christian views have treated other faiths and cultural traditions as inferior that we have to make special efforts above all in the West to foster an equal dialogue between major religious and ideologically based groups. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned in China. To that I now turn – to the *san-chiao* tradition.

7 Continuities and Discontinuities between Mao Zedong Thought and the Traditional Religions of China

In the aftermath of the 4 June 1989 massacre, it is hard to know how Marxism in China is going to evolve. But we can first of all step back a little and see how Maoism relates to the three traditions of China. Oddly enough it may turn out that the revival of religion in China, which already has been under way since the death of Mao, will result in more intellectual forms of the faiths having a greater purchase on the Chinese imagination, because of three or four factors – the spread of literacy (which is one of the achievements of the regime), the greater urbanisation of the populations, and the decay of popular religion of the old style. It is hard to know: but it will at least be of some theoretical interest to observe some of the relations between Mao Zedong thought and the three traditions. In selecting out Maoism as such I do not commit myself to the view that Chinese Marxism is simply going to revive Mao's thought. It has differing directions in which it can go. But it is one way of making a preliminary survey of the tensions between Marxism and the *san chiao*. It is of course just possible that a symbiosis might come to exist between the four (together with the 'other two', namely Christianity and Islam).[1]

First, let me relate Marxism to the Confucian tradition. There is a continuity in form. For each was thought of as a value-system or worldview for the guiding elite. In the one case the imperial examination system hooked Confucianism firmly to the values of the higher civil service. In the other, Marxism supplies the guiding norms for the cadres and members of the Chinese

Communist party. But in regard to content there are sharp contrasts. The somewhat hierarchical character of Confucian ethics, through the notion of the relationships between ruler–subject, husband–wife and so on, differs from the theoretical egalitarianism of Marxist ethics. The hierarchical nature of the ethos and conflicts with his father helped to turn Mao somewhat fiercely against the Confucian tradition, and he became a strong advocate of women's rights. Second, Marxist materialism opposed Neo-Confucian metaphysics which, partly under Buddhist influence, had an idealistic flavour. Moreover, the traditional education was literary and elitist. Because Marxism has been concerned among other things with the modernisation of China (though in a radically modified form in Mao's thinking, because of his toying with romantic notions of a simplified kind of modernity in which the complexities of technical thought could be bypassed), it has presented itself the more strongly as scientific in character.

This stress on science has not worked out, as it happens, in practice, for at least two main reasons. Through the Cultural Revolution, Mao caused upheavals in higher education (indeed, throughout education) which wrecked technical and scientific training for more than ten years. Second, the totalitarian system is not suited as an environment for scientific education. The oxygen through which genuine science and technological innovation breathes is that of open discussion and the trying out of new ideas, as well as the empirical testing of hypotheses and new inventions. The dead hand of conformism stifles science. It is possible, paradoxically, to overcome the effects of this up to a point by having a scientific elite protected from the wider world – given privileges which shield them from the exercise of conformism. This happened to a degree under Stalin and his successors. But that of course is a mighty paradox in an egalitarian society.

Each system had its conservatism, but again in content they diverged markedly. While the Confucian tradition looks to a golden past and draws on the ancient literature of China, Maoism looks to the future. The one is conservative and the other revolutionary, in a quasi-Messianic manner. This gave them differing slants upon history. The dynamic dialectical account of the historical process in Marxism (while it may echo in a way the Yin-Yang theory of the Chinese tradition) lent itself much better to the analysis of the problems facing China in the 19th and 20th

Centuries. As elsewhere Marxian thought had a methodological role in understanding the colonial period and the economic forces of the industrial revolution and its aftermath. Though internationalist in ethos it helped to fuel national sentiments.

Indeed it may be remarked in passing that it was above all the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 which helped to crystallise, among the Chinese intelligentsia, a sense of outraged Chinese nationalism. The Manchu dynasty had caused divided loyalties by its remembered foreign influences. But after the 1911 revolution, China was preparing to take a more aggressive stance and to look for a worldview which would help it to modernise. The failure both of the reforms and of the philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei revealed the relative impotence of Confucianism in expressing a new nationalism. It was indeed ironic that China should look to two Christians, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, as leaders in the struggle for control of China. It was also interesting that the greatest upheaval in the recent history of China should have been inspired by a 'new religion' with a strong Christian input: that is, the Taiping movement of Hung Hsiu-chüan (1814–64). The attraction of Marxism lay partly in its being a 'counter-ideology' in the West – on the side of revolution against capitalism, which manifested itself so devastatingly as entwined with colonialism in the Chinese context.

Your enemy's enemy is not necessarily your friend, however. Mao's genius was to overcome flaws in Western formulations of Marxism to make it better adapted to the Chinese situation and to the policy which Mao was beginning to work out. In particular there was his stress on the role of the peasants in the Chinese revolution. It was nationalism stimulated by colonialism which gave Marxism its formidable power in a number of contexts. Its role as a leading ideology in the struggles of a number of emerging nations is significant – for instance in Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and South Yemen, as well as in China. Conditions vary: it was Mao's achievement to represent Marxism in terms relevant to China. The red flag had Chinese stars woven into it.

Institutionally, Confucian regard for the family and the ancestors clashed with Marxist wishes to radically reform society. Hence it was that Confucian rituals or *li* were washed away in a whole apparatus of counter-rituals. Thus holidays celebrated the new work ethic (Holmes Welch, incidentally, remarks on how

exhausting this process was: for the old holidays took you into a time separated from the everyday time, and refreshed with difference, but the new rituals kept reminding you of the daily grind). The new conscious egalitarianism of dress contrasted with older signals of hierarchy. The secularisation of life brought heaven to earth, so that anything and everything could be a symbol of the success of Communism. Pigs on farms acquired haloes, and trucks were signs. There was socialist realism in art and music, the theatre, cinema and ballet. The kind of feelings which were inculcated were those of warm commitment to the Party's world-view, together with patriotic passions. Neo-Confucian contemplative techniques, Buddhist yoga and Pure Land fervour got in the way of these feelings, and hence were to be suppressed. Almost nothing of the traditional arts and graces of Chinese society could remain – save gymnastics and cooking, perhaps. As far as the Confucian tradition went, the cult of ancestors, Neo-Confucian values, feelings of decorum and the old ethos were swept aside.

Let me now turn to the divergences between Maoism and the various Buddhist traditions. As I have remarked before, Buddhism was in so many ways very amenable to modernisation. In countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand intellectuals have not had great difficulties with merging an up-to-date education with Buddhist traditionalism. The philosophy of Emptiness and impermanence has, as we have remarked, great affinities to the spirit of modern science. Oddly, the latter seems to have rediscovered idealism. It is ironic that Soviet scientists over a long period were warned against Einstein's Relativity Theory on the ground of its idealistic basis. Here Marxism came to be trapped by the robust but dated categories of the Victorian era. Even so, Marxism has never been radically materialist as the cultural and conscious epiphenomena of matter have had a vital role to play. Still, there was an uneasy relationship between Marxist theory and the new paradoxes both of Einstein and of the Copenhagen school.

Not only was the idealistic cast of Buddhism a cause of clashes between it and Marxism, but there was also a subtle contrast in evaluations of history. Buddhism did of course have a certain theory of history in the Chinese context, in that it assigned the ascendancy of differing teachings of the Buddha to different periods. This was part of the influential T'ien-t'ai synthesis, as

we have already noted. There was also a Messianism in Buddhism, which has not been without influence in Chinese peasant rebellions – namely the expectation of the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya. Still, the revival of Buddhism in modern times has been aimed in non-political directions – the modernisation of Buddhist techniques of teaching (borrowing somewhat from Christian missionary methods), the revitalisation of meditation and the spiritual life, both within the Sangha and among the laity, the reshaping of Buddhist education, and the revival of Buddhist learning under the stimulus of Western scholarship. All this could be summed up in the life and work of T'ai-Hsü (1890–1947). These themes, however, were not powerful in the promise of a regenerated China which could stand up forcefully to the Western powers and Japan. Though T'ai-hsü associated with and received support from Chiang Kai-shek, it was unlikely that Buddhism could stir itself enough to provide a boost to Chinese national identity. The inner meditative goal of Enlightenment was far distant from the vigorous extrovert and violent activism espoused by Mao.

If there were Buddhist themes which lurked behind the messages of Mao, they were transformed and disguised. The Messianism of course was there, in a mode which blended the Pure Land and Maitreya. The dream of a paradise far to the West was transferred to the future. The older dream was proclaimed as a certain future, now that China was led by the Communist Party. In principle, incidentally, the Pure Land should spread to the whole world, but it is significant that the Chinese have not paid very much attention to the world struggle: their hopes have been introverted, and have focussed on China itself and on the peripheral region which has historically exercised China's policy-makers. But the joys of the future were to be collective rather than individual. The inherent individualism of Buddhism was to be replaced by collectivist aspirations.

Again, the ideal of the suffering Bodhisattva was transformed into that of the Party activist who sacrifices his own welfare to work ceaselessly on behalf of the People. During the Cultural Revolution the little red book of the sayings of Chairman Mao became in effect a sacred scripture with a ritual role and almost magical effects. You had to wave it at rallies, and meditate on its themes. You had to appeal to it in suggesting action. The miraculous properties ascribed to it were reminiscent of those

accorded to some Mahayana texts, such as the Lotus and Heart Sutras. The faith in Mao himself at that period was a modern secularised version of adoration of Amitābha. (By 'secularised' here I refer to one of the two main meanings of 'secular', namely that which is non-religious in the traditional sense of 'religious': the other meaning, as when we talk of a secular State, is 'pluralistic'. Obviously, Marxism as practised in China has been secular in the first sense but not in the second. Indeed Marxism is, so to speak, the official religion of the State.)

Of the varied philosophies typical of Chinese Buddhism perhaps Hua-yen has the greatest affinity to Marxist thought, by its emphasis on mutual interdependence. But it is a static vision of the cosmos, contrasting with the dynamism of Marxian thought, through the idea of the historical dialectic. Moreover, there was little in the Buddhist heritage which could help Chinese to understand the fate that was overtaking them in the 19th and 20th centuries. The economic materialism of Marxism was in this respect much more attractive. By schematising immediate history it gave a sense of drive and destiny to the national struggle. The very existence of the Sangha was a reminder of Buddhism's otherworldly goals.

Mao's anti-intellectualism (itself a paradox in one with strong intellectual interests) could perhaps be echoing from the Ch'an tradition. Buddhism's scepticism about everyday concepts could help to reinforce Mao's attack on traditional education. There was in Ch'an a powerful discipline at work, and the new Communists also had their discipline. The goals of course were divergent. But that element in the Buddhist heritage did appear transformed during the Cultural Revolution in particular. The blank mind could be a stage on the way to mystical experience: or it could be a means of political control and the paper on which were to be inscribed the characters of a new civilisation.

Let me now turn to the relationship between Taoism and Mao's thought. In regard to the older philosophical teachings, the notion of harmony with nature is contrary to the Marxist ethos, which sees nature as something to be fought with dialectically. It is true that humanity and nature will ultimately coexist, in the Marxist vision. But the exploitation of nature is very much part of the economic struggle in which Communism is engaged. Moreover the Taoist emphasis upon an inactive conformity of nature is quite against Marxist activism. Only more recently has

the Taoist vision seemed to have some relevance among environmentalists keen to moderate the damage done to the natural world and the planet by modern means of exploitation of resources. On the other hand, that aspect of Taoism which is anarchistic and against formalism had a strong appeal to Mao. Mao of course used a dose of anarchism in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This appealed to a romantic streak in his view of revolution. His distrust of bureaucratisation made it an adventure to release the forces of the young against the State itself. In some ways the whole affair was a fraud, in that the anarchism was to bolster a dictatorship and a cult of personality. But it is interesting that in order to maintain his own authority he had to rely on very different forces from those implicit in a well-organised totalitarianism. In struggling against the formal mechanisms of the Communist system he leaned on evangelical fervour and his own charisma. In a formal society respect for the ruler and for the values of the system come through a process of schooling and control. Now Mao relied upon the commitment of vast numbers of individuals glued together by the faith expressed through the little red book and in adoration of the Leader. It was highly reminiscent of the period immediately before Hitler's rise to power, where a similar religious fervour was used.

Taoism's old idea of a heavenly peace, of a perfect future society (the T'ai P'ing), reinforced Marxist Messianism. But it also reinforced the anti-intellectualism which I have mentioned in connection with Ch'an. The mystical ineffabilism of both the Buddhist and the Taoist traditions have a very different meaning from the analogous attitudes of Mao, but they could prepare the way for that singular rejection of both ancient and modern learning which Mao advocated during the Cultural Revolution. Mao thought that you could short-circuit the future. He was undoubtedly disturbed by the thought that China, having become strong, still needed science and technology as derived from the West. His dismissal of the atom bomb as a paper tiger was a symptom of his hope that simple means could bring prosperity to revolutionary China. The Taoist overtones of his striving for a new society are striking. But it was all a romantic dream. Mao was a great hero in giving China strength and military independence: but his ideology was highly defective in trying to build a new society on the foundation of national self-sufficiency. Even traditional Marxism has its problems: how much more so the

romantic Maoism of the Cultural Revolution!

There is, incidentally, a strand in Asian Marxisms which hankers for autarkic simplicity. We can see it in the vicious anti-intellectualism of the Khmer Rouge (since capitalism pollutes the purity of the Khmer people, so do all those affected by modern knowledge – hence the destruction of a whole class of Cambodian professionals). The ideology yearns for a society isolated from capitalism and modernity. A similar worldview prevails, quite independently, among the JVP (Janatha Vimukti Peramuna) of Sri Lanka. It looks for a secular sort of monasticism and a kind of corporate nirvana, cut off from the rest of the world. There have been similar traits in Buddhist socialism, which has kept Burma isolated from the world since the 1960s.

Taoism as a religion, with its investment in alchemy and the pursuit of old age and immortality, was not suited, because unscientific, to the reconstruction of China. The interesting thing about Maoism was that together with its anti-intellectualism it inherited the Marxist view that it alone was scientific. This helped to give impetus to the cleansing of society from all those forces of superstition which it identified with the traditional religions. Marx's hostile view of religion within the fabric of capitalism was understandable enough for one who lived in the London of the heyday of capitalism and the industrial revolution. At any rate it carried over usefully to China; from Mao's point of view, since religious customs were so woven into daily life, a revolutionary change could be brought about (he thought) only by a headlong assault upon religions.

All this was done in the name of the People. It is interesting to observe how this earthly abstraction took the place of Heaven in older tradition. The Mandate of Heaven became the Mandate of the People. The mentions of heaven in Mao's poems can be understood if we simply substitute the word 'People'. Heavenly Peace became popular peace. All this is interesting, for the very notion of the People masks the inherent nationalism of Maoism, and indeed of other Marxist systems. It so happens that since the time of the French Revolution and before, nationalism, which has become the most vigorous force in politics, has appealed to the authority of the people as ideological justification. Ideally there is a democratic system in which the State is run by rulers who act on behalf of the people. Now it so happens that this secretly buries the internationalism of Marxism. Consequently

when Ceausescu acts on behalf of the people the primary meaning is the Romanian people; and when reference is made to the people by Hanoi, what is meant is the Vietnamese people, and so on. Primarily in China what is meant is the Han people, or more broadly the various peoples living under Chinese rule. So Mao's Mandate of the People no longer has any internationalist sense. This is an added reason why Marxism was able to function so successfully as a means of restoring national dignity. On the other hand, it could easily pave the way for Han chauvinism. There was an ambiguity: the people could apply to all citizens treated as equals and indifferently; but it could also be the majority ethnic group. So the domination of Tibet could thus be justified. Han Chinese settled in Tibet were simply members of the people, if Tibetans complained; but actually they were representatives of the dominant ethnic group.

In brief, then, Maoism served as the ideology of resurgent Chinese nationalism. But it paid a great price for its success. While the Japanese and Indians in differing ways hitched themselves to ideologies of national reconstruction which incorporated important elements of their ancient traditions, the Chinese borrowed a foreign ideology, which, though adapted to Chinese conditions and in this sense sinified, demanded the destruction of the old order. Virtually all of the Chinese past was repudiated during Mao's time, save as I have noted the language and traditional cooking. Confucian values, prerevolutionary literature, Buddhist worship and meditation, Taoist practices and philosophy, older opera and music, Chinese traditional painting, much of the older architecture – all these were washed away, for the most part. During the Cultural Revolution in particular iconoclasm was at its height, and many temples and texts were disfigured or destroyed. The past of China was sacrificed on the altar of the future, and was buried beneath the sober, puritan, jargon-ridden, egalitarian, proletarian values then fashionable.

But not only this. By his attack on education, Maoism also drove out a great part of modern knowledge. It is an interesting irony that about twenty years later, during the uprising in Beijing before 4 June 1989, the young people were again on the march, not for the puritan values of the previous anarchy, but on behalf of greater openness and pluralism – demands that ran counter to the evangelical uniformity of the Cultural Revolution.

The intervening period, from the death of Mao in 1976 to June

1989, has of course seen a great relaxation and the redevelopment of higher education and technical training of various kinds. The short war with Vietnam in 1979 was an eye-opener. The People's Liberation Army was shown to be so much weaker and less well-equipped than had been realised. The call to genuine modernisation sounded more stridently. Deng's pragmatic policies helped to release a great deal of vitality and permitted a modest re-emergence of the traditional religions, notably Buddhism. Could we envisage that perhaps in the future there might be a new version of the old *san-chiao*, namely a *szu-chiao* or four-teachings system? Could a relaxed Marxism lie side by side with the older values?

From the point of view of Marx's own general ideas there is no reason *per se* why certain religious practices should not continue in a Marxist society. It depends really on how we take religion. If we consider it to be primarily centred on spiritual techniques and this-worldly self-mastery and self-awareness, then it could rightly fit in with the richer life of people which Marx promises as the product of the revolution. If a person in the new society could paint and write and fish and dig all in the one day why should she or he not also add the practice of yoga or worship? It might turn out that a suitably purified Buddhism and Taoism might have a place in the new society. Activities such as pilgrimages to holy mountains could be woven into the total activities of society. In a devolved Tibet a peaceful coexistence between the regime and the Dalai Lama is quite conceivable. Some of the moral values of the traditions could complement those of official Marxism – Buddhist reverence for life, Taoist regard for nature, Confucian reciprocity and so on. Ritual practices such as religious funerals enhance community solidarity – and so forth.

There is of course some question as to whether Marxism is going to survive, at least in an official form. Events in Eastern Europe indicate the degree to which people are disillusioned with it. It is possible that as in the former Soviet Union it will wither away also in China, despite the trend towards recentralisation evident since 4 June 1989.

But even if the repression of religious expression continues, the religions will, in one form or another, survive. This is partly because of the diaspora Chinese communities of the world together with East Asian nations such as Korea and Japan that carry on some of the major traditions evident in the Chinese

past. It is also because they have an increased influence in the West (and possibly will have in Africa). Buddhism is flourishing in America and elsewhere; a third wave of Confucianism is revitalised in Singapore and elsewhere; there has been a rediscovery in the West and elsewhere of philosophical Taoism and the beginnings of a better understanding of religious Taoism. All these traditions will live together in a plural global civilisation, together with other great faiths and secular ideologies such as scientific humanism and Marxism itself. Hence the general question which I have set myself in this book, as to how the great worldviews are going to coexist, remains a key question, and includes the question of the four-teaching system.

As I have indicated above the traditional religions of China certainly have some modern messages to convey to Marxism. Buddhism for instance, with its Noble Truth of Suffering, has something important to say both to Marxism and to consumerism. The troubles of this life are not eliminated by our modern successes in feeding, clothing, housing and curing people. Personal and family sufferings are not avoidable, even if the depths of misery of the past are greatly behind us (in some major countries of the world at least). Moreover, the Bodhisattva ideal may teach us that even when we have solved problems in our own society we need to look to the welfare of other nations. For instance, when I was a child rickets was a common disease in Scotland but now has gone. That should not blind us Scots to the problems of Malawi or Burma. In both ways Buddhism may be a reminder that solutions to immediate problems are only partial solutions. Marxism by itself cannot dismiss death, and foreseeably is to be part of a world system which includes uneven development.

As I have mentioned, Taoist values concerning harmony with nature are vital for various obvious reasons in the modern world, especially now that we see that Green problems tend often to be global problems, which cannot be dealt with without full international cooperation. It is not possible to pursue the Khmer Rouge ideal of isolated salvation. China cannot close itself off, even if it wished to do so, from the rest of the world system. There is also an urgency to consider in all societies, including Marxist ones, what the values should be of old age. Is there not some question of introducing the ideals of the Hindu tradition, no doubt in China's case adapted in accord with Taoist and

other values, of spiritual stages of life? The Taoist preoccupation with the elixir of life and the attainment of longevity is being in part answered in today's world where humans are living longer and longer on average. This demands more philosophical reflection than it is getting.

Confucianism is in a different position from the religions, in that in the old days it constituted the official value-system of the ruling elite. Since in a Marxist society it is the Marxist philosophy which performs this task, there is a problem of accommodation between the two. Nevertheless, there is something important which traditional Confucianism has to say to Marxist ideologues. A singular weakness of Marx's own thinking was that, despite his obvious and blazing passion for justice and the cause of the poor, he had a singularly cynical view both of the function of the State and the nature of the law. This is one of the attractions of Marxism to totalitarian revolutionaries: it gives moral sanction to immoral acts. It has a relativism built into it which can stifle all kinds of qualms, about killing 'class' enemies and so on. The Confucian tradition has, of course, some highly important things to say about the moral values demanded of rulers. The Chinese certainly have the traditional resources to evolve a civilised Marxist theory of government.

The tragedy of Maoism was that though Mao himself was a brilliant theorist of guerrilla warfare and a successful exponent of national reconstruction in the first phase, his philosophy left China where it had been a hundred years before. In that period it was fashionable to look for a blend of traditional Confucian values and Western technology: the first for spiritual values and the second for use. By the time of Mao's death there was the parallel question of blending Maoist values and technology. But the philosophy was in its own way at odds with the advancement of the Chinese people. Without decentralisation, higher education, criticism and some degree of pluralism, it is hard to create dynamic economic progress. Also, there was always the question of the outside world. Was China to remain in large part cut off from the global economic system? If so it would stay poor. But if it joined in too whole-heartedly the Maoist values would fade. This dilemma is part of the reason for the June 1989 crackdown. But something cruder lay behind it too: how do you hang on to power in a more pluralistic framework?

The fact is that Marxism, like all other value-systems, is

entering a new age. It is one of a tightly-integrated world economy. It is possible to run a country as if it itself were an independent corporation, and to some degree national governments may also serve the functions of trades unions: trying to protect the interests and wages of their citizens amid the gyrations of the transnational corporations. But on the whole, integration with the global economy is on a more piecemeal, industry-by-industry basis. So it is that Marxist economies themselves are getting drawn into this total system. This is one reason for the crumbling of Marxist orthodoxy in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The global system favours pluralism on the whole, for ideological reasons in part: human rights, democracy and federal governments are distant offspring of the Enlightenment, which itself is one of the parents of modern capitalism. But we are unclear at the moment as to how the global economy itself is going to develop. It may evolve into a system which is loosely regulated by transnational agencies, and is dominated perhaps by a hundred or more corporations. It would thus be a loose empire without a capital. Below this level will be the layer of national governments, which will be gradually pressured into pluralism. Other agencies of a non-commercial nature will interfere with the system, perhaps in beneficial ways – such as the United Nations, UNESCO, Amnesty International, drugs cartels, the Roman Catholic Church, ecumenical religions from Islam to Buddhism to Christianity, and so on. In these conditions religions will become more privatised, probably more scientifically-oriented, agencies of criticism of the global order and particular orders, given more to 'worldly' pursuits, such as social action, meditation within everyday life, worship, self-improvement and so on. But all this is in the long term. The immediate outlook is a good deal less hopeful. A backlash among authoritarians and nationalists, whether of left or right, could reduce pluralism in many pockets of the system, above all maybe in its largest pocket, namely China. It could be that new means of human control will be invented which would make existing totalitarianisms look feeble and inefficient. But above all, the more immediate future is likely to see the multiplication of bitter ethnic disputes. It is already obvious from experience that ethnicities, once they become self-conscious, can spur people, especially in the face of perceived oppression, not merely to fight but to fight on for decades (consider the Kurds, the IRA, the Palesti-

nians, the minority peoples of Burma, the Basques and numerous other cases). Especially in Africa and Asia there are many minorities who feel that they have been unfairly treated: such peoples will evolve more deeply their sense of self-identity. Meanwhile very little is being done to evolve new methods of federal government and new ways of satisfying more local aspirations within regional polities.

This reminds us of course that while Buddhism was not a major contributor to the Chinese nationalist struggle it is part of the very fabric of Tibetan nationalism. Although the Dalai Lama has consistently urged on his fellow-countrypersons the need to struggle peacefully, the combination of religion and nationalism is a powerful one, as has been proved in recent times, in Iran and elsewhere. The clash between Marxism and Buddhism here still retains a very sharp form.

Part of the problem for Maoism and Chinese Marxism – as well as for every other worldview – is the need to produce a credible theory about the genesis and value of its rivals. Unfortunately, Marxism's official theory of religion is outdated, partly because Marx and Lenin were, through no great fault of their own, ignorant about the world's religions. They wrote before many of the more insightful treatments of these matters were available. Feuerbach's critique of religion and theory of projection relied heavily on the model of religion provided by 19th century Christianity. But during the early years of the Chinese revolution, after 1949, some sensitivity in the debate about the nature of religion was shown, in regard to Buddhism especially, partly because the new government wished to win friends in the Buddhist countries around China. Even so, many things have gone wrong with official theory. Religion does not wither away: it does not flourish most among the uneducated but rather among professionals and others in the 'middle' classes: it certainly has not withered away in the Soviet Union. It is no doubt time for a radical overhaul of Marxist thinking about religion and ideology. At any rate it is quite clear that each worldview needs an account, from its own perspective, about the others. In effect this is a demand for the softening of attitudes everywhere, which will be important in the creation of a new world order.

But it may turn out that, despite the guns and thought control, the most powerful force in the world is the freethinking of people, stimulated no doubt by the interaction of the modern world,

especially through the media. While people's freethinking erodes authority (and it is amazing how unsuccessful the 'brainwashing' is in totalitarian educational systems, mainly because there is really no such thing as brainwashing), it also helps credible worldviews and practices seen as useful for whatever reason. It is true that totalitarian treatment of popular rites and institutions may cause them to disappear. Without repetition rites are not much, and without physical embodiment institutions become ghosts. Yet there is little doubt that Buddhism will have its great revivals in China, and Marxism will feel the pressure to adopt a more rational and sensitive stance towards its rival worldviews. A four-teaching system is still conceivable.

But much of the action in the world takes place outside of the Chinese environment. There, the relation of religions is vital. I shall turn in the next chapter to the possible complementary relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. Beyond that I shall move to the wider topic of the world's religions as a whole.

8 Buddhism and Christianity: Complementarity?

I wish to argue, on the top of the earlier discussions in this book, that Buddhism and Christianity are complementary religions. This is of course a simplification, because there are different Buddhisms and Christianities. Moreover, it is an obscure claim. What is it for two traditions to be complementary?

First, by this I mean that the two traditions (or families of traditions) are not flatly contradictory, but have a major convergence of ideals. And second, I mean that there are contradictions and divergences of emphasis: but that these represent on the whole useful critiques of the other tradition. That all this is so is a piece of good fortune, though it is not without logic in the phenomenology of the human spirit. Thus it is worth noting that the major stresses in the two traditions are on mysticism and the worship of the numinous: Buddhism is the faith of mysticism par excellence, even more so than the Hindu tradition, with its plethora of numinous gods, sacraments, myths, pilgrimages, household rites and so forth as well as its (mystical) yoga and *neti neti*.

I have already pointed, in Chapter 2, to the contrasts and likenesses between the two religions. I do not intend to repeat my sketch. It is my task here rather to show how the divergences involve a useful mutual critique. So I plunge forthwith into this, beginning from the side of Buddhism – how its insights may help Christians. Thereafter I shall deal with the converse.

The first point I would want to note is that Buddhism, for all its rich use of myth and imagination, has a vital philosophical core. As the world has progressed into a period of the spread of much wider education and a period of scientific and technological expertise, the old myths fade. It is true that stories of one sort or another flourish: fiction above all, which is beginning to become the mythology of the modern age; and movies and

television serials. People are much fascinated by the telling or filming of action in sequence. But the stories of the gods are not quite what they were, and even the quasi-historical narrative of the Bible has become very much an acquired taste. History, as narrative of real past events (or ones that are thought to be real) lives on: and biography. But the fanciful flights of the gods are not what they used to be. The fact that the Ramayana has recently had a great success on Indian TV and that the Mahābhārata has played well in a new vast stage version in France and England are themselves ominous signs. While myth goes on where the rites and festivals continue, they still lack their old grip on the human imagination. Now scholars give them the Jungian massage (Joseph Campbell) or the Freudian injection (Wendy Doniger).

Buddhism suggests more strongly a more cerebral interpretation of religion. Its philosophy needs to be more up front, if Christianity is to overcome its problem of being mythic. Well, it may be said: it is only mythic in the narrative sense – it is based in history, in both Testaments. Still, that history has to be seen against a numinous and deep background. If Christ died for our sins on the Cross, the Cross needs its backcloth of philosophy: of metaphysics. *For our sins* – the phrase echoes strongly perhaps in the imagination, but not in the story, at least taken as literal history. There may have been a first female, as some evolutionists argue: but not handing a persimmon to her man in Kuwait, or thereabouts. I shall later argue that the substitute for the literal history, via metaphysics and the dialectics of history has something to say to Buddhism, weak on these fronts. But Buddhism, by its rather cheerful use of mythic narrative and powerful stress upon philosophy, has a metaphysical message for Christianity.

There is something more. The Buddhist sense of transcendence is different from the Christian. They see the gods as part of this world, and only the permanent or the empty as transcendent (it depends whether you are a Theravadin or a Mahayanist here). It seems to me that this transcendent lies in the region of the cosmos, but on its hidden side: whether it stretches back to the transcendence of the Creator of the Cosmos is a question. But as noumenal it has something to say to Kant. Kant was wrong in two ways, or at least unjustified, in calling the noumenal world that of 'things in themselves'. The *ding an sich* is a *ding*. But things

are merely our projections, our wishing to cut the continuum up into things that can be handled both perceptually and through our hands and bulldozers. Behind phenomena it seems much better to think of process or events. Second, Kant wanted the plural, totally unjustified by the rest of his theory. Maybe one should use *process* as a mass word – neither singular nor plural: in that case the noumenal world is process.

And behind that? If one stretches the Buddhist concept of transcendence backwards, then it would suggest a 'side' to the Absolute which is only got at by the negative way. This tradition of negation (but applied to a thing – why not to a changing person?) is traditional to the Christian faith, but needs reinforcing. Buddhism's idea of skill in means also helps: in reminding Christianity not to take its sources too literally. In brief: there are two sides to God, one ineffable and the other with the spiritual characteristics of a person. This observation is repeated in so many religious traditions – Sufism, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Hindu Advaita Vedanta, Taoism, and so on. Although I do not believe that this idea is universal (or that any other is) it is a pervasive theme, and I think that those who believe in God ought to believe it. It is part of mainstream Christian faith; but it is often forgotten by those whose faith is mainly mythic – that is, those who are 'purely' Biblical and narrative in content. The main line of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism is built on a certain philosophical cast, correcting and complementary to the wonderful enthusiasms of those who drink in the Bible.

There is, as we noted in an earlier chapter, a certain backlash against the mainstream. This frequently takes the form of mythic Biblicism. It has its own talents and innovations. It is often full of energy. It counters the chief tendency I sketched earlier: the trend towards the fading of myth in the modern world. But in a way it confirms it: the literalists slice the fish of myth on one side and swallow that; the liberals take the other side. Moreover the 'fundamentalist' strand itself often depends on sophisticated arguments about liberal scholarship, evolutionary theory and the like. Myth rests again on doctrine.

It is easy to feel that Buddhist myth is merely educational: a way to teach deeper truths. The *Jātaka* stories tell us about morality. The Buddha's teachings are enough: you could throw his story away. His parables are illustrations. The figure and story of Vairocana is really a colourful way of representing

ultimate reality (or should I say 'ultimate process'?). Mara can be dissolved into psychological forces which militate against liberation. But in one sense such demythologising will never be complete in Christianity: and for that matter it will not work either in the modern world, for history takes the place of myth, and is indeed myth, today. But of that more anon.

Buddhism, because of its abstractions like Suchness and Emptiness, the Tathagata, interdependence and so forth, appeals to the scientific and metaphysical mood of the contemporary world. Also, its yogic kind of practicality – especially in a growingly individualistic and eclectic milieu – is alluring. In this it has its lessons to teach Christianity. The latter is much concerned to promote the need of grace and to phase out thoughts of gaining salvation by good works. This is in part an expression of the lone holiness of God. The divine has the power and the sublimity: the faith tries to express this as purely and vividly as possible. Perhaps this has led to some neglect of practical measures for self-improvement. Buddhism's practice of developing the four holy virtues (*brahma-vihāras*), its emphasis upon continuous self-awareness (*sati*), the complexity of its prescriptions for *jhāna* or meditation, as in such works as *The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*) – all these are impressive and can be used by members of other spiritual and humanistic traditions.

On the matter of grace and forgiveness, there may be some confusion among Christians. The Reformation no doubt rightly criticised elements in the Catholic tradition that awarded points, so to speak, for good deeds as though our actions might contribute to salvation. The chief lesson of Jesus' (and Paul's) teachings is that salvation comes from God alone. But this belief is entirely consistent with the cultivation of calm and peace, benevolence and compassion, self-understanding and so on. The desire to improve oneself could be motivated by recognition of God's love and goodness towards us.

The practice of yoga in a Buddhist manner has a special point of interest for the modern theist. Whether or not the attainment of pure consciousness affords a glimpse of the Divine, it does involve penetrating to something which – so to speak – is the supreme flower of the evolutionary process. It remains a philosophical puzzle as to the relationship between conscious and physical states – about which of course different philosophers have taken different positions – but so far as we know in the

immediate universe around us, human consciousness is the most advanced form. The attempt to go inwards and so to gain purity of consciousness is already an important experiment psychologically. It is of course a supreme means of gaining the highest peace. This no doubt has a different flavour from that peace which passes all understanding which crowns the Christian's sense of God's love: but they are consonant flavours, I presume. However, relatively few people are going to tread the Path of Purity as far as those depths of experience that mark such mystics as Thomas Merton or Meister Eckhart: the preliminary stages of the way are however practical means of self-cultivation. In brief, Buddhism has a highly detailed and practical approach to self-training which is not so readily evident in the Western Christian tradition and particularly in recent times, at least up to the 1960s.

I would add that present developments in the world are an important phase in the onward march of human knowledge. It is relatively recently that we have been able to take advantage of the meeting of traditions. It would be absurd for us to reject the insights of the European Enlightenment just because they are not delineated in the Bible: similarly there is no call for Christians to reject the resources made available by other traditions such as Buddhism, now being richly encountered.

To return to metaphysics and doctrine, there are aspects of the Buddhist attitude which have something to offer in regard to the formulation of Christian belief. The dissolution of substances in the world might cause us to reflect as to the changeability of the transcendent: that is, as to the nature of God. For Greek reasons, Christianity opted for the doctrine known as the impassibility of God. This seems to me implausible, in so far as God ought in any event to be affected by the fates of her or his creatures. The thought that God too is involved in process – or indeed is a process – naturally arises from contemplating Buddhist philosophy: it is a path which is of course congenial to that group of thinkers known as 'process theologians', centred chiefly in Southern California and associated with the work of Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb. This group is much influenced in turn by the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead[1]. John Cobb has already written influentially in the area of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.[2]

However, it should be noted that the Buddhist tradition has

typically taken it to be the case that a changing God is within, not outside, the cosmos. This assumption seems to me questionable, to say the least. But it presses us to be clear about what we mean by transcendence. For me, an intelligible notion can be framed which leaves God 'outside' the world, that is not in the framework of the spatio-temporal continuum. But as the world unfolds so the relations between God and the world shift, and this already implies that in some sense God changes too.

The non-self doctrine also has something to say in regard to the mutual penetration, according to classical Christian doctrine, of the members of the Trinity. The *anātmavāda* already calls in question the picture of the human being presented in the Greek and hence in the Christian tradition. It locates the person as the lifethread of a series of events, or as the history of a living process possessing human characteristics. It sees the individual as a node of causes and effects. It implies that we have no clear edges to ourselves, for we exhale not only a cloud of invisible radiations, but also a cloud of personal effects: and we receive the exhalations of others. This notion seems helpful in understanding something of the Trinity, where the relationship is supposedly the closest possible – as if all three members penetrate one another in perfect emptiness and perfect love. The three spirits are like spirits which are self-less, as the Christian thinker Lynn de Silva[3] argued.

In brief, the whole idea of impermanence may cause a shift to appear in Western ways of formulating and thinking about Christian doctrine. But Buddhism of course will not be unaffected by the impact of Christianity. This has already become most evident in the matter of organisation. Buddhism has adopted Christian methods of self-expression and communication, through missionary societies, the Young Men's Buddhist Association, the World Fellowship of Buddhists and so on.

But strange to say it may be in relation to the mythic dimension that Western views may become the most influential. I say 'strange to say' because in many ways myth is less vital in Buddhism than it is in some other religions. The fact is that myth as meaningful narrative has been undergoing a transformation ever since the Hebrew Bible and culminating in the modern period. Meaningful narrative now above all means history. This may not turn out to be 'pure' history, since it is loaded: but it is highly important for a sense of identity. This can

be illustrated most successfully through the history taught in high schools in such countries as the United States and France and Japan. When modern nationalism took a grip it led to the demands of universal education. This was in part because modern education was a necessary ingredient in the processes of developing industrialisation and the creation of relevant institutions, notably that of the nation state. Ministries of education were interested in teaching history in order to build a sense of national loyalty. This is still the chief impulse in contemporary teaching of the humanities, as far as governments go, who are of course the chief supplier of resources in education. Now the history of Britain (say) which is taught is highly selective. Typically it projects modern arrangements backwards. Thus the history of France goes back to before the boundaries of the modern nation were even approximately established. Similarly Japanese history is treated as unitary, even in periods before it was so. The history of Italy goes back to Julius Caesar and beyond: before there were Italians as such. All this we take as natural: but it is of course highly artificial.

It is however profoundly important, because it establishes a kind of collective memory. It defines a people's sense of identity. As we see in today's world, such identities often generate fierce loyalties, especially where full autonomy has not been given to those whose identities are thus defined (Armenians, Lithuanians, Kurds, and so on). If the body of a nation is its territory, its soul is its history.

In addition to the sense of national identity there also developed what may be called metaphysical or theory-laden history, notably in the work of Hegel and Marx. This sort of historiography gave a kind of general understanding (or purported understanding) of the development of the modern world and even of the future. In this kind of history various shadowy theoretical forces are at work – class-struggle, alienation, exploitation, and so on.

All this weight placed on history in self-understanding is reinforced by the claim that modern historical method is scientific. It is true that critical modern historical scholarship often serves to debunk some of the national flourishes and selectivities that enter into the story of 'our' country, etc. In this critical manifestation we should be happy with the practice of contemporary historiography.

Further impetus to seeing the world under the aspect of time and as a developing human process was given by evolutionary theory. For this promised the possibility of tracing back our nature through various animal transmutations to the distant past. The poet and Christian theologian Leslie Paul once wrote a book called *Nature into History.*[4] This neatly captured some of our feeling for the progress of events from animal ancestry to modern humanity.

All this has of course not been without effects upon religion. Despite the critical parts of New Testament and other Biblical scholarship it has helped to root Christianity ever more firmly in the historical process. Of course the historical events have to be seen *sub specie divinitatis* – in the light of metaphysical forces (this, by the way, is one reason why Marxism is such a natural offspring of the Christian tradition). But the events and processes are nevertheless historical ones. Modern scholarship tends to dismiss that aspect of the myths of Christianity and Judaism that seem unhistorical and what we might call 'imaginative' representations of divine–human relations. The garden of Eden fades, and Jonah vanishes; the wedding in Cana in Galilee seems to drift into a parable. *Revelation* is the record of a fabulous vision but does not depict the human future.

Even those conservatives who do not like the undermining of total Biblical authority turn these myths into history: Adam and Eve were really there, maybe in modern Kuwait. The ark can be found in the highlands of Eastern Turkey. The rapture may come during a nuclear war. It is an irony that they too are as modern as the liberals. It seems the days of older thinkers are gone. We are all modern now.

All this poses a certain question for Buddhism. History has entered into cosmology. But most of Buddhist myth is not historical, though bits of it are: mostly it is imaginative – the Buddha Amitābha, the previous lives of the Buddha, the stories of Bodhisattvas, the sermons on Vulture's Peak, the depiction of the Pure Land. Even the theory of the differing periods of human history and the decline of understanding and resolve since the time of the Buddha has a fanciful air to it. It is no longer quite such a strong story, and its strength as skill in means is in decline. Now some Buddhists might well claim that the fact that the beings and paradises of Buddhist myth are imaginative shows the superiority of Buddhism: it deliberately makes use of the play of the

imagination and so is in tune with deep psychological forces in our lives. Maybe so: but it still leaves Buddhism with the task of interpreting the history of the human race and, behind that, of evolution. This story is not incompatible with rebirth doctrine, though it does not work in so easily with it. The fanciful accounts of the early human race found in the Buddhist scriptures do not fit any more easily with our present knowledge than does the story of Adam and Eve. So Buddhists need to do some rethinking about human history.

This links up with a theme which Western Christianity has looked on as profoundly important, especially perhaps in recent times: it is the theme of social action and involvement with the world. Unfortunately modern Buddhism's engagement with human affairs has been highly political in the last fifty years, especially in Burma and Sri Lanka, where Buddhist nationalism has had unfortunate effects. But there have also been movements towards social action and a new social dhamma. In this Buddhism is partly learning from the social Gospel of Christianity. A new awareness of the social-historical placement of Buddhism is itself stimulated by Western developments concerning history and the need to get beyond merely individualistic ethics.

Although evolutionary theory has put the affinity between humans and animals on a deep historical basis, it may be noted that in the realm of the imagination Buddhism has had a much clearer view of our relationship to other forms of life. These two need to be blended in a new appreciation of interdependence. The somewhat exploitative side of Christian thinking, with humanity as the viceroy of God in command of the earth, has, despite recent misgivings, been on the whole beneficial: since the development of agriculture and the use of mineral resources and so on have been conditions for the higher standards of modern life. But the reckless pursuit of wealth needs checking, and a more moderate synthesis between Buddhist and Western values will surely be beneficial. Such a process has not, however, so far been very evident in Japan and some other Buddhist-influenced Eastern countries.

At the moral level, neither pacifism nor ideologically-generated violence are in my view practical. The synthesis between Buddhism and the West would be a doctrine of the minimisation of violence, which if sincerely held and applied would embrace both international and national forms of police

action, without unleashing the brutalities of machismo and war.

Another area where Christian experience has something to say to Buddhism is in regard to the numinous and grace. While Buddhists have incorporated, in remarkably radical form in the case of Shinran, the experience of the gracious saviour into their life and practice, it is under cover of the theory of dispensations – how at differing times the skill in means of the Buddha's teaching takes different forms. But beneath that idea there forms a more profound question. Is the experience of the great Other something which is inherent in humanity's nature? And if so should it be given equal weight to the mystical experience within?

Now Theravada Buddhism, as I have already indicated, is mysticism without God. The gods and numinous experience are demoted to incidentals. On the other hand the powerful sense of the holiness of the Buddha Amitābha and his saving grace (for only from holiness can holiness flow) is at the forefront of Pure Land Buddhism. It is not easy to see that the styles of the differing Buddhisms can be reduced to the need for differing messages at differing times. It is also relevant to the whole question of a Buddhist theory of other religions (which has been singularly lacking, especially in Theravada countries). Buddhism has to come to grips with Otto.

It is possible to appeal, of course, to projection theory and to Freud in particular, to undermine the perception of the Other. But there is an irony in this. Freudian theory of religion is based on Vienna, but was ignorant of Sarnath. Because of this the theory is open to severe objection. To appeal to it precisely because it does not fit Buddhism but does fit Vienna is singularly inappropriate.

Now there are of course philosophical problems about accepting religious experience as a basis of belief: and yet it is part of the very fabric of religion to be conscious of the awe-inspiring features of God or of the ineffable depths of what lies at the bottom of the psyche. And the whole theory of grace, so vital in many religions' feeling (in Christian faith, in Islam, in Ramanuja's theistic philosophy and so forth), flows from the idea of the numinous. The focus of worship, when intensely felt, is supreme holiness. She or he becomes the only source of holiness: so it is that humanity's salvation must spring from God, and cannot strictly be at all due to what men and women do, beyond accepting grace or clinging to God. All this has become clear to

the numinously-oriented saints of East and West. If we are to attach any weight to religious experience, then surely we need to attach it in a just way. It is of course not a matter of justice but of argument. Why should mysticism within be given greater weight than the numinous without? If we put them together as equals, then we arrive no doubt at some form of Mahayana or Eastern Orthodoxy or modern Christian faith influenced by dialogue. Both old Presbyterianism (strictly numinous) and Theravada (strictly mystical) are insufficiently embracing. And yet both have an important place in the economy of things as true experiments in living – the one trying out the purely mystical path and the other a severe form of numinous distance between heaven and earth. Anyway, these are all Christian challenges towards Buddhism, and might induce a rethinking of the relations between Pure Land and the Theravada. This is, in any case, necessary because such organisations as the World Fellowship of Buddhists provide a framework in which the problem becomes necessary to resolve. In brief, the dialectic between the numinous and the mystical is part of the complementarity between the Christian and the Buddhist traditions.

Though the historical nature of the Christian myth challenges some of the fancies of Buddhism, it helps to reinforce an aspect of Christian thought which blends with Buddhist doctrine. I refer to the notion of *kenosis* – that is, how God in Christ empties himself of the divine attributes to take on full humanity. This mythic self-emptying works so much better with a modern historical understanding than any older view that Christ was really all-knowing and so on, but heroically concealed his powers to act naturally. So Christ is emptied of divinity, which is a strange parallel to the whole Buddhist analysis of emptiness and its lessons for morality and self-training. But Buddhism supposes that at the end of day we can overcome suffering by insight or wisdom. It is ignorance which lies at the root of our troubles, and the Buddha's path is one which overcomes ignorance. This contrasts with the emphasis of Christian soteriology: here sin is original, the primordial force which through a human *act* brings alienation from the Divine Being.

Both the notions of original sin and original ignorance are important. Perhaps the Buddhist teaching might help Christians to overcome a neglect of the importance of true vision – as though our problem is to reactivate the will towards the good,

without enough insight into what the good is. But, in any case, the Christian teaching has to be radically rethought once the myth of Adam has faded. How can a 'second Adam to the fight and to the rescue' come, if there were no first Adam? If the first Adam is imaginative myth, then what does Christ's salvation amount to? From what? In the light of evolutionary theory the whole story has in my view to be retold. Maybe it has to be retold somewhat as follows.

The Divine Being in creating us decided to bring into being free beings who could reflect, but in a 'material' mode, his own image. But freedom is not by miracle, but a naturally-emerging property in a whole cosmic process. So the physical universe grows life, and life grows us. We thus emerge from that natural screen of events which conceals us from the Divine. It is true that it was by action we were alienated from God, for we were designed as beings or processes who were physical and at the same time free to act. This inevitably gives us a self-centredness which is the first stage to freedom, though it differs from God's interpenetrating love.

However, such an account, making the fall from innocence into the rise into being god-like, raises the question of whether we should not treat ignorance as at least equally important as faults in our will. The Buddhist stress upon ignorance seems to me entirely plausible. If Christianity is too voluntaristic, Buddhism may supply here a corrective.

As I have noted, the coming of evolutionary theory and modern historical consciousness must cause Buddhism to rethink its view of human emergence. As I said, while it does not by itself render rebirth implausible, it does perhaps cause unease. Of course we could be seeded from a distant star. But the rather timeless quality of rebirth doctrine presents problems in a time-arrowed universe. Or at least in our corner of it. Moreover, there are questions raised by genetics: rebirth would become metaphysical, operating by homing in on appropriate combinations of genes. There seems no evidence for karma as a third force, in addition to the two parents. It could be, but it is an uncomfortable hypothesis. For this and other reasons the Western critique of karma theory might lead Buddhists to deeper reflections about the imaginatively-mythic quality of the belief. And they might reflect that as a sense of individuality fades so the need for precise and individual karmic connections also fades. Perhaps

the Buddha's memories of previous lives are telepathic representations of other worthy lives. When prudence has been sapped by the cultivation of equanimity and selfishness by the practice of compassion, the world of karma dissolves into the world of living beings. If the doctrine is reinterpreted to mean the mutual solidarity of all the fleeting inhabitants of this wondrous sphere the earth, or of this wondrous world, the cosmos, then it fades with glory. Anyway I leave such thoughts to Buddhists to accept or reject or modify.

But if Christianity and Western thinking pose questions of karma, so does karma pose questions about heaven. The notion that moral progress is a long drawn out thing is an important one, and it may well be as John Hick[5] and others have argued that the life beyond death stretches onwards in a process of greater perfection. Heaven need not be static, or translation there decisive.

Both religions as they get to know each other well will surely reflect on the convergence of ethical ideals and religious feelings. Both will have a strong sense of the Bodhisattva and Suffering Saviour. Both will recognise the gleams of the transcendent and the need for compassion and love. But each will challenge the other and stand as a corrective to the other. As I like to say: the pluralism of religions keeps them honest.

Yet a critic might say: Do they keep each other honest enough? I have indicated ways in which profound changes are likely to take place and have already in some degree happened. Would it not be more honest to bid the traditions farewell rather than struggle through so many crises to adjust them? If I am going to be cavalier enough from a Christian perspective to alter the whole theme of salvation by appealing to evolution, or from a Buddhist question to call in question the notion of rebirth: if I am going to stress the imaginatively mythic character of Bible stories, or decry the traditional theory of historical decline in Buddhism: if I am going to criticise so much of traditional language, by calling substance in question, or to suggest that Theravada Buddhism is incomplete – then how could I hold on to tradition? Is it not much more honest to be free of them?

Well, I am not going to argue against those who feel this and simply become agnostics. That is obviously a free, and attractive, option. But though I am sometimes drawn to it, I also feel 'I can no other'. The pull of the tradition is stronger, even if I

spend so much time reappraising it and twisting it this way and that. The two traditions are singularly profound and beautiful. Like others – like all human processes – they can display ugliness. But they also show great beauty: the vision of gleaming ideals beyond this world; the shine of heaven, the immortal place, nirvana; the suffering of God and the self-sacrifice of the Buddha-to-be; the love and compassion of Christ and the Buddha; the nobilities of both Jewish and Indian heritages; the profound experience of the numinous and the deep plunge into the ocean of mysticism; the subtle philosophies; the vigorous civilisations; the human qualities of their material dimension; their contributions to the welfare of humans and other animals. And so the traditions are not to be thrown away just because our knowledge has changed. As our knowledge changes we have to reappraise the traditions, that is all. So we need not become agnostics. But we have a duty to take each other and modern knowledge seriously. We also have duties to our fellow human beings, to convey so far as we can what is golden from the past.

This is why some ways of modernising in the world today pay too high a price. I have stressed earlier the stimulus which Buddhism has provided towards spirituality and philosophical subtlety in Chinese civilisation. It would be a tragedy if the Marxism of Mao Zedong and his successors were to wipe out the past. It may have had its faults: but it was also a great resource. And so our global world will itself be a much poorer place if all our traditions are turned into museum pieces, or tourist traps, or wiped out. I am sure that both Christianity and Buddhism have vast contributions to make to global civilisation in the future. I have argued in this chapter that they have a certain complementarity. I think their convergence can increase and their overlaps widen; but they do represent differing visions of the cosmos and of life in it.

Indeed, they will make their contribution to human culture by remaining different, however much they may influence one another in some of the manners which I have sketched in this chapter. If there is a danger in modern globalisation it will be the danger of homogeneity and domination by one culture (Western culture it looks like at the moment: colonialism is not yet dead). With homogeneity there will be a severe lack of criticism, and of the dialectic of argument. Much of the fruitfulness of the great civilisations has come from their inner tensions, held however

within a certain common framework. The clash between late medieval thinking and the rediscovered classical world of the 15th and 16th centuries was a major factor in the birth of modern science, art and literature. Hegel's view of history, though much too schematised, has a certain plausibility. It would be still another tragedy of modern living if the great world traditions were to soften and disappear. We need to live together: but we also need to argue.

Of course, it might be an objection that though I talk against colonialism, my very attempt in these lectures to trace out the relations between Buddhism and Christianity itself represents a Western project and is therefore implicitly colonialist.

I think not. Liberal values try to find the truth: they are the foundation of modern seeking. There may be colonial pollution in liberalism. But criticism including criticism of colonial pollution is also part of the liberal ideal. Liberal study as such is no more Western than science itself. Science and liberal values had to arise somewhere. To me a very illiberal thing is the way philosophy is so often taken as identified with Western philosophy; and likewise many of the attitudes which Westerners apply to non-Western religions are very illiberal. If my treatment of the two faiths here contains pollution, then let criticism clean it out, not the sacrifice of the ideals of liberal study.

9 Buddhism, Christianity and Other Religions

As was underlined in the first chapter, we live in a world where all cultures are in close interaction. Consequently we do not merely have to think about the mutual relations of Buddhism and Christianity, but also about the way they both relate to other religious and non-religious worldviews. In particular it will be useful to view their interchange with four major traditions (or clusters of traditions). On the Western front, so to say, there is the question of Buddhism's interface with Judaism and Islam; on the Eastern front, with Hinduism; and on the Southern front with the multitudinous small religious traditions of the world – with classical African religions, with tribal religions in Papua New Guinea and Oceania, and so on. The small religions of the world, that is those embedded in the fabric of relatively small-scale societies, are collectively important even statistically, amounting to over two hundred and fifty million persons. I shall add a comment or two about Christianity's reactions to these four traditions. But not much has been written about Buddhism and non-Christian religions – most of the effort at dialogue and analysis having been taken up with Buddhist-Christian studies.

Much of what I have said already about the mutual relations between Buddhism and Christianity applies equally to the case of Judaism. But Orthodox Judaism's regard for the written and oral Torah, and its concern with the meticulous following of complex rules relating to virtually every aspect of life, all as part of obedience to God, raises questions from the Buddhist position. It is true that Buddhism has its *vinaya* or rule governing the behaviour of members of the Sangha. As this was elaborated scholastically it included a host of minutiae. Still the notion of ritual purity is – by and large – unimportant in Buddhism. Rules are given utilitarian justification, and the emphasis is upon moral integrity as part of the path to liberation.

As we know, Christians replaced the Torah with Christ as the centrepiece of salvation and obedience. For this reason a highly

negative attitude to the Torah often became the norm among Christians. The two religious movements flowing principally from the ambit of Pharisaism, namely Christianity and Orthodox Judaism, diverged more and more widely. What was often missing from Christian criticism was the acknowledgement that the rules of the Torah make concrete the practice of the presence of God. Also, of course, the Law was the primary manner through which the Jews maintained their historic identity within the wider embrace of predominantly Christian and Islamic civilisations.

The Jewish survival through history raises two issues for the Buddhist, and indeed for the Christian. The first is that the Jews have given the world a practical lesson in non-violence. If for the Christian Christ is the Suffering Servant, for the Jews it is Israel. The question of the meaning of this practical lesson becomes more acute when we consider that the Jews, through the belief in the concept of the Chosen People, are the archetypal ethnic group. As a nation their identity is defined by loyalty to God. Leaving aside the foundation of the modern State of Israel, which poses its own conundra about identity and non-violence, the passage of the Jews down history illuminates a profound, but difficult to practise, truth: that ethnicity can avoid aggression. Now Buddhism in theory is universal and makes no theoretical concessions at all to group identity. From this perspective, it is a great puzzle to Buddhism to deal with a religion which both claims universal meaning and practises particularity and a sort of seclusion from the rest of the world. But yet as we know too painfully in the case of modern Sri Lanka, ethnicity can get woven into Buddhist attitudes: so for instance the Theravada becomes the most powerful ingredient in Sinhala nationalism. This has its precursor mythology in the chronicles of Sri Lanka, which are cheerful in expressing joy at victories over the Tamils and their appropriate slaughter. The Jewish example, of a whole people at the service of God as a 'light to the Gentiles', and that in the most peaceable and harmless fashion (even alas to the ghastliness of the Holocaust), might give the other faiths, including Buddhism, pause to reflect. That example, of divinely oriented ethnicity and Torah-generated identity, has something highly relevant to say in the modern world.

We should not be misled here by the complications of the Torah. The fact is that every ethnic group has its own mini-

Torah. There are some bits of behaviour and mythic loyalty and ritual which are unique to the Scots, or to the Czechs, or to the Thais, or to the Chinese. The danger about the defining marks of nationalism is that they can be taken to signify superiority. It is easy to be proud of being Chinese or Scottish: secretly this may breed the feeling that we Chinese or Scots or whatever are superior to others. Out of this in turn springs chauvinism, even if we know in our bones that all humans are equal and that being Chinese or Scottish is an accident of birth and upbringing. It needs no underlining that the roots of most modern warfare have been grown in the soil of nationalism. We are by no means at the end of the nationalist epoch, for so many ethnic groups must still struggle for the achievement of autonomy and State-hood. Their bitterness at the denial of freedom fuels the continuation of warfare. Ironically Judaism itself is now implicated in ethnic struggle. At any rate the history of the Chosen People has been a lesson for others, and might remind Buddhism of a quite different basis for non-violence, at least in relation to humans.

The problem of how to deal with minority groups will be raised again when I come to discuss the position of the smaller religions and ethnic groups. It is a problem rendered the more acute in the modern world by demands, quite natural, for majority rule, and also by Islam's reappraisal of its place in the workings of the nation-State. Again it is not unnatural to hear calls for the imposition of the Shạri'a in the contemporary context: and yet this can be severe in its effects on minority non-Muslim populations. For instance part of the cause of the civil war in the Sudan has been resistance to the application of Islamic law to the southern region, most of whose inhabitants are Christians and followers of classical African religions. Buddhist countries, though not possessing the equivalent of the Shari'a, nevertheless do not have an altogether happy record in regard to the problem of minorities: in Burma such peoples as the Karen have long been struggling against central government; in Sri Lanka there is the civil war between Tamils and the majority Sinhala; in Thailand the position of the Muslims remains unresolved; Japan has not a very favourable record in its treatment of minorities, whether Ainu or Koreans; and so on.

Islam, in codifying its law, borrows from Judaism: in some ways the results are admirable. Its duty of almsgiving prefigured the provisions of the modern welfare State. It may be that the

Islamic system, with its conscious drive to create political entities within which Islam can be practised as a religion, has something to say to Buddhism, which has often had a highly ambiguous view of political power. There is a contradiction between the call for non-violence and the social and military demands laid upon a Buddhist ruler. The device of thinking of the rulers as becoming repentant, like Asoka after his defeat and slaughter of the Kalinga people, and as, through his repentance, becoming an ideal Buddhist monarch, conceals the tensions in the Buddhist worldview over the matter of political power. The more realistic Islamic position has its attractions. However, it is not suited, unless modified, to the modern world. The fact is that every country has minorities; and in the global context every religion or ideology will turn out to be a minority worldview (except perhaps for that worldview representing a general human agreement to live together under certain rules). Traditional Islamic political philosophy will need to undergo restructuring. On the question of the use of force, a doctrine of the minimalisation of the use of violence will provide a *via media* between Islam and Buddhism.

The other lessons which Islam offers to Buddhism perhaps are like those nourished by Christianity. But it is worth noting that Islamic mysticism, or the Sufi tradition, meets with Mahayana contemplative traditions and reinforces various Buddhist themes – the non-dual experience of the Absolute, the glittering interconnectedness of the world, the practice of mindfulness and so on, though in two contexts which differ somewhat from Buddhist practice. First, Sufism works in the context of a set of legal and ritual rules, but uses them as a discipline which has a much deeper meaning than lies on the surface. Second, Sufism is not celibate, and illustrates a relatively unusual path (unusual that is in comparison with the modes in which meditation tends to occur in other great religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Jainism).

Buddhism has of course what it offers to Christianity: a reminder to both Islam and Judaism of the force and importance of the *via negativa*. Because these faiths appeal to revelatory books they can too easily fall victim to a kind of literalism inappropriate in treating of the nature of the ultimate. Moreover, Muslims need to ponder the non-theistic character of so much of the Buddhist tradition: it is a challenge to the conventional wisdoms of the

Islamic tradition – for instance the notion that every human being is naturally a Muslim. This is like Karl Rahner's concept of the anonymous Christian. These notions need revision in the light of the real facts of the history of religions. Because Islam grew up within an environment in which the chief religions were Judaism and Christianity (though it was soon to discover Zoroastrianism in the Persian Empire), it has tended to have a very limited theory of other religions. There is a real need for modern Muslim scholars to address the challenges represented by the opening up of the comparative study of religion to a wider world. So far the broader study of religions has made relatively little progress[1] in Islamic universities.

Because of Muslim horror of idolatry it has been easy for Muslims to come into violent conflict with adherents of other faiths. This has been most evident in India. Islam and Hinduism are like oil and water, and Islam also had a hand in the demise of Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. Yet it made strong progress in India, partly through the activity of the Sufis. But let me move to the relations between Buddhism and Hinduism (and I shall later say a word about the interface between Hinduism and Christianity).

It is easy to forget that over a long period Buddhism was the most important religious movement in India and that over another long period it and the Hindu tradition shared the allegiance of most Indians. Buddhism faded in due course, so that now it is easy, even for scholars, to think of Hinduism as shorthand for Indian religions. There are ways of presenting Indian philosophy, too, as primarily consisting in those systems which have a Hindu ambience. Moreover the present-day rather marginal state of Buddhism in India is partly illusion: India has shrunk to become the Hindu-dominated republic. However, had the British not treated Ceylon as a separate crown colony, but rather had made it part of the Raj, our attitudes to Buddhism within Indian civilisation would have been different. Sri Lanka is part of the wider Indian cultural area. Had Nepal and Tibet been conquered by Britain, they too would have probably become part of the Raj and would have been treated as an integral part of Indian culture. They are not of course quite the same as the heartlands of modern India, linguistically or culturally: but much of India is in the same condition – Assam, for instance, and the Dravidian-speaking South. So we should not forget that

Buddhism is a vital part of the Indian heritage. Moreover, it is arguable that Buddhism actually precedes Hinduism.

A usual story is that Buddhism is a kind of protest offshoot of the Hindu tradition. But there is not much evidence of this, beyond the fact that there is criticism of the Brahmins in the early Buddhist scriptures. In order to be clear about the relationship between the two faiths it is vital that we distinguish between roots and formation. That is, the period of formation of a tradition may occur several centuries after its roots are in evidence. Classical Judaism has its period of formation (coinciding with the development of the rabbinic tradition and the coming into being of the Talmud, etc.) during the two or three centuries of the Common Era. Of course many of its roots lay in much more ancient times – the period of the Exodus for instance. The formation of Hinduism consisted in the creation of such practices and entities as the following: the establishment of temples and the widespread worship of images; belief in reincarnation and karma; the use of *Upaniṣads* and other sacred texts; the creation of the caste system and the dominance of brahmins; the elaboration of Hindu *dharma* or law; the belief in avatars, and so on. This formation brings into being something we recognise as Hinduism. It dates from the first centuries of the Common Era also. By this time Buddhism had been flourishing for some time as a well-organised movement with its monastic tradition, cult of *stupās*, use of scriptures and so on. So there is an important sense in which Buddhism was formed quite a bit earlier – say four or five centuries, than Hinduism as we know it. Most of the early Buddhist canon is older than most of the *Upaniṣads*. Of course, some Hindu roots reach further back than Buddhist roots, because the Hindus preserve the hymns of the Veda, reflecting a strand of religion later incorporated into the fabric of brahmin-dominated Hinduism. There was, of course, a set of religious practices presided over by brahmins at the time of the Buddha, but they were not what we mean by Hinduism (and did not yet contain such crucial ideas as those of karma and rebirth).

Moreover, like other religions, Hinduism has recast its message and some of its practice during the modern colonial period. When we talk about Hinduism today we refer to a much more closely integrated system than the multifarious practices of premodern Hinduism. There is much more conscious awareness of something called Hinduism: and important neo-Hindu thinkers

like Vivekananda (1863–1902) and Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) have' provided a unifying philosophy for Hindus during the period of national struggle against the British and during the times of modernisation before and since the end of the Raj.

The contributions of Buddhism to the Hindu tradition have already been very considerable. The belief in reincarnation and karma, while not unique to Buddhism, probably entered the Brahminical tradition from the pool of religious movements of which Buddhism was the most notable – those movements associated with the figure of the *śramaṇa*. The scale of the Buddhist-influenced Hinduism was much greater than the narrow cosmos inhabited by the Indo-European gods of the Vedic hymns. The distinction between higher and lower truth, crucial to Nagarjuna, became a cornerstone of Sankara's philosophy and later, in elaborated form, became a vital ingredient in the neo-Hindu theology of Vivekananda. The theory of avatars owed much to the Buddhist idea of the teacher who comes to restore the Dharma every so often, when faith has declined. The general pattern of time postulated in Hindu tradition was designed after the Buddhist theory of epochs. The Buddha himself became an avatar. In these and other ways Buddhism helped to shape Hinduism. Perhaps most of its lessons have been taken on board by Hindus already. But one or two points still remain.

First, the Theravadin Buddhist does have to protest against its easy assimilation into the Hindu theory of the unity of all religions. This, really a modern development though not without some ancient roots, suggests that the Buddha really preached a Hindu theory of the Atman, beneath denials of selves. From a modern Advaita Vedanta perspective, the Buddha was really pointing to the same Reality that the various other religions indicate. But though there have been a number of modern attempts (e.g. by R.C. Zaehner) to do this, it really has to fail. Of course theoretically you might say that the Buddha has been misunderstood by ninety-nine per cent of his followers. Such a view does virtually nothing to promote the unity of religions, because it is the mainstream tradition of each faith that we have to deal with – with the ninety-nine per cent in other words. It is in my view better to promote the unity of religions by pluralism – by not trying to force them into a single mould. Unity will not be substantial agreement, but it will be promoted by mutual respect and decent debate, and by a dialogue of lives.

A second point in the Buddhist heritage, still highly relevant to the Hindu situation, is the critique of caste and class found in it. Those who converted to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar (1891–1956) are still deeply aware of the reforms of Hindu society that still need to be undertaken. The power of untouchability has not been seriously shaken.

In certain ways Hinduism and Christianity are very close. The modified non-dualist or Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy of Rāmānuja is most apt for expressing the Christian doctrine of creation and the notion of God as inner-controller (*antaryāmin*). The emphasis on the Brahman or divine Reality without *guṇas* is a variation on the results of the *via negativa*. Hindu philosophical theology has many lessons to teach the Christian thinker. Hindu piety or *bhakti* echoes that of the Methodist or pious Catholic; Hindu *dhyāna* can teach some yoga to the Western mystic. Yet both Christianity and Hinduism could do with the Buddhist critique of substance. Both the theistic traditions are dominated by the notion of *things*, and the move towards a process theology can perhaps be reinforced by the Buddhist metaphysics of impermanence.

The caste system has rightly come in for much criticism, and partial defences of it by modern Hindus have not been convincing. But it is in its own way a major key to the decentralisation and tolerance of Hinduism. By permitting divergent social groups to organise separately but within the major structures of a single society it may have something to say to us about life in a modern plural world. The fault with it lies in two things – its hierarchical arrangement, and its closedness. Thus, the differing castes are arranged at different social levels, around the overall skeleton of the four *varṇas* (or five, counting the untouchable layer). This layering of course leads to inequities, even in religious matters. Only the top three strata can have access to the fully revelatory texts, or *śruti*. The bottom fifth traditionally were excluded from temples, and the Indian constitution guaranteeing them access is imperfectly expressed in reality. The brahmins have a dominant role, and in general the way the castes are ordered is not equitable. Second, they are closed in the sense that there is no real caste for the casteless (though one is beginning to emerge in the big cities, e.g. among Indians married to foreigners). This means that it is not easy for an individual to leave his social classification. Sometimes this may be done in

groups as they claim new religious identities, etc.

But in theory the castes could lose their hierarchical and closed structure. They would be voluntary communities of people who intermarry and possess certain religious and other customs in common. This is what India as a democracy aims at: the gradual elimination of divisions and ranking in society. If one were to move to an equigroup society, it would be a model for the living together of diverse religious and ethnic groups within the cities of our world. For though the concept of the melting-pot may have been good at a certain stage in the evolution of modern America, it is not a universal prescription that can have practical application. Rather groups, such as, let us say, Pakistani Muslims, can live together and intermarry in a big British city, but can not only attract equal rights before the law but also allow, perhaps perforce, those who wish to stay outside the community to do so. Society would thus become a congeries of equigroups and multifarious individualists. To have a theory of society which allows of this is to learn something from the caste system.

The complexity, regionalism, pluralism and loose unity of Indian society constitutes the structure which makes it attractive, despite the manifest problems of poverty and outbreaks of sporadic communalism. It represents an important model for us to look to in trying to frame a new global society. India has also been fortunate in that its nationalist movement did not draw on rigidly Marxist values in its struggle for reform and independence. Indeed India has managed – largely through the philosophy of neo-Hinduism – to modernise while at the same time acknowledging its multiple heritage. And so the richness of its many strands of culture has not been bulldozed by revolutionary dogmatism. In this it contrasts well with China.

There are signs of a backlash: so-called 'fundamentalist' Hindu forces are on the increase. But the centripetal power of the Hindu tradition is not all that strong, so that we can imagine that the semi-anarchic traditions of India will prevail. The price of unity is pluralism: attempts to enforce a stronger unity might really lead up to the break-up of the Republic.

I turn now to an even more loosely defined grouping – the small-scale societies, often joined together in new nations, sometimes embedded within much larger societies, sometimes living on the margins of highly developed nations. Traditionally, each society had its own religious practices, woven into its fabric.

Each was like, say, a village in Italy of a hundred years ago: being a villager and being a Catholic were the same thing, more or less (I add the qualification because in every society there are a few rebellious individualists). But during the last century, with the successive impact of such forces as colonial conquest, the spread of trade, the intrusion of hunters and farmers, wars, missionary endeavour, modern education, bureaucracy, and tourism, these smaller-scale societies have experienced traumatic changes, often amplified by European diseases arriving in the wake of the forces listed above. It is not surprising if in such societies there has been a three-way split (at least): between those who cling to the old ways and values, those who embrace incoming Christianity (or in other places, Islam or Marxism) and those who follow new religious movements, which have sprouted all over the world: the Ghost Dance and Peyotism in North America; Cargo cults in Papua New Guinea and Melanesia; Zulu Zionism, Kimbanguism and countless new religions and independent Churches in Black Africa; and so on. Often such new movements borrow form and maybe substance from missionary Christianity, but also contain motifs from the ethnic past. They are an unconscious way of trying to adapt older values to the new conditions, and to gain some degree of independence in spiritual matters from the missionaries and others flooding in from a great and partly unknown Beyond.

Sometimes the way forward for such fragmented groups is to form an alliance. Larger wholes are conceived. For instance it is common to think now about Native American religion: different Indian nationalities ally themselves to emphasise what are conceived as common values (with a strong emphasis on harmony with nature and a kind of spiritual environmentalism). Similarly it has become the fashion to speak of African religion, as though there were a common mosaic of African ethnic values: this concept is in part a result of the work of Western scholars of religion and in part the product of a felt solidarity in *négritude* or Africanness. This new federal self-consciousness is another way of providing resistance to the disintegrating forces which accompany the impact of the modern world on relatively small traditional societies.

The small societies have some great weaknesses apart from smallness of scale. They are faced with religions and ideologies, not to mention educational systems, which claim universality.

But how can the Navaho claim that every one ought to become an adherent of Navaho values? The religious myths of the past are highly particular, and this is a weakness. They may testify perhaps to a people's genius, but they have to face strong intellectual forces which often despise the mythic mode. So one defence of tradition is to say: Navaho religion is for us, and we shall maintain it (even maybe teach it in our schools); other people should keep *their* religions. The effect of this argument is of course to advocate a religious federalism.

It may be noted that members of a small-scale religious society are typically torn three ways, as I have said above. Religious federalism as a defence of traditional values only works for some of the group. Because of divisions in societies which were previously more homogeneous, people have to make choices – and in doing so bring to the surface a latent individualism brought on by the impact of the alien forces (which themselves being mostly capitalist and often democratic will be inclined to advocate individual choice). Therefore, even in smaller societies whose previous structures had their own authority there will be a breakdown of tradition only remedied by the glue of commitment.

Buddhism of course has a tradition of symbiosis with popular religion. It allows it to continue, though hopes to take the commanding heights of the spiritual economy. It also has a long record of – so to speak – hollowing out existing customs and placing moral values at their heart. The techniques of Buddhification of popular custom which we see exemplified in the Pali canon can also work today. But though Buddhism has made a slight beginning in Africa and Latin America, its overseas successes are chiefly modest and chiefly in Europe and America. It is far from having that strong presence which Christianity of various persuasions has in the Southern world.

Once again we are faced with the pressure for federalism – for a global world in which the different religions and ideologies will live together. But already this has political and moral implications. It works against any forced conformity, whether through an established religion or through an orthodox ideology. It may of course turn out that orthodoxy will reign in certain countries, such as Iran or Albania. What do we do about such enclaves on non-federal thinking? It is part of the logic of our whole argument that we ought to work, but with minimum violence, against

the harshness of such regimes. We shall have to consider, in the next chapter, the shape of the new global society towards which we are rapidly moving.

Meanwhile, both Christianity and Buddhism will need to reformulate their thoughts in the face of the multiple challenge presented by the great and small religions which we have been considering. Buddhism particularly needs a way of coming to terms with the theisms of the West and with varieties of Hindu *bhakti*. It is not for me to work out some full schema here, for that would be more properly the task of the Buddhist philosopher. In a way it is very similar to the job of working out an ecumenical Buddhist position which could synthesize Theravada and the Pure Land schools, as well as some of the less alarmingly divergent forms of Mahayana. If Buddhism is to hold to a projection theory of theism, then some more positive value might be put upon the uses of the spiritual imagination. Meanwhile it may be that the notion of the Buddha-nature can function for Buddhists to explain the mystical experience of the Sufis, Hindu contemplatives, Christian mystics and Jewish kabbalists.

On the Christian side, the notion that the Divine Being dwells within each one of us is a key to thinking about the inner achievements of Buddhist, Hindu and other yogis. Moreover, the Christian can perceive the present phase of human history, for all its dark tragedies, as drawing the world together. The vision of Teilhard de Chardin is significant here. His concept of the noosphere was perhaps stated naively, but it gives us an image of the interpenetration of our modern world. That drawing together may sharpen some conflicts, as the Iran hostage crisis illustrated. It is also in part the product of two World Wars, which wickedly hastened the onset of technology which binds us together even more tightly. Despite the black side of our global world, it is not absurd for the Christian to see in it too the work of the Holy Spirit, that *antaryāmin* or inner-controller which guides humanity towards its goal of unity.

That unity however – as we have argued in several places in this book – must be based in pluralism. Too tight a unity would stifle human creativity and the dialectical interplay which interaction between the great worldviews promises. The present chaos of ideas in the world is bound to be productive. We are entering upon a new renaissance. That will not be helped, however, if Western colonial values still predominate.

It will also be resisted by those forces of backlash which exist in all the worldview traditions. We can see something of an emerging struggle between the softer and harder powers locked up within the religions and ideologies. Just to glance briefly at those harder powers: we can see that Islamic 'conservatives' (who are really innovative adapters to modern conditions, though from a neo-traditionalist perspective) are still undergoing some resurgence in Egypt, Jordan and elsewhere in the Arab world. This will doubtless become clearer when the regimes of Assad in Syria and Saddam in Iraq begin to crumble. Such conservative resurgence is very clear in Malaysia and other parts of Eastern Islam. The underlying reasons are not hard to find. They relate to the decline of Islamic prestige in the modern world in part because of the colonial period and in part because of the rather poor response so far to revitalisation of Islam through Islamic modernism.

Among the Jewish population, there are harder forces at work in Israel. A revival of Orthodoxy is following the heyday of liberal or Reform Judaism in the States. It is too evident that the teaching of Judaism, even at liberal universities, is locking Jewish intellectual life back into a ghetto. In the Hindu framework, movements such as the Hindu Vishva Parishad are set on a new path of militancy.

Such conservative backlashes will resist the pluralism which we have been underlining and advocating. The new global federal world will not emerge without a struggle. For even the secular ideologies are undergoing the same experience. The events of 4 June 1989 were one manifestation of this. Though under the benign demolition work performed by Mikhail Gorbachev the legacy of Stalin is being dismantled and more liberal ideas are soaking widely into Eastern socialism, old Marxism has its backlashes too. And should we even speak of a *liberal* backlash? Can there be a conservative neo-liberalism? I think there can. It is a liberalism of majorities and homogeneous individuals, the old liberalism of the nineteenth century, and the liberalism of the Kennedy era – judging other values by 'our' values, seeing the West as king, not allowing for deviations, viewing other cultures with suspicion, imperialism beneath the skin. That liberalism is also reasserting itself, and also threatens a world of pluralism and federally arranged values. Its danger is in crushing minorities through one-person-one-vote. It too must be resisted. It is

my task in the final chapter to sketch a possible shape for the new global world.

Though in dealing with world religions I have focussed on major traditions lying outside of traditional Chinese civilisation, let me return for a moment to the Chinese situation. Both Christianity and Islam have a future in China. They are both tenacious once established. If a time of relaxation comes to China, I predict that Buddhism will again have a high influence. Those three great missionary religions may well expand in China during the next century. They surely need to understand one another. So some of the themes of this chapter will remain vital to the China that lies beyond the immediate epoch of the 1990s.

10 Towards a Higher-Order Agreement on Worldviews: the Coming Victory of Pluralism

We are strange creatures, we humans, both immersed in events and yet able to stand back. The invention of the modern social sciences, including the study of religions, marks a new phase in human self-consciousness. I have argued for a genuine method of warm detachment in the exploration of religions and ideologies – so that we can begin to tell things as they are – to delineate sensitively and accurately the lives of those involved in value-systems. I do not pretend that complete objectivity is possible, though it is not an ideal that should be abandoned. Differing writers and artists and others involved in the delineation can complement and correct one another. This method, of informed empathy, gives off an incurably liberal air, for various reasons. This is relevant to the progress of our argument, and I shall explore these reasons briefly.

First, it would seem that only in circles, such as research institutions and television companies, etc., where writers and producers are left relatively free to pursue their methods, without political or religious interference, can a genuine documentation of religions and ideologies take place. But a society in which there is relatively little pressure to conform to certain preconceived values is in that respect a liberal society.

Second, traditional religions have not typically regarded scholarship directed towards reasonably fair delineations of their own or anyone else's tradition to be an ideal. Scholarship has been hitched to doctrine and ideology. Consequently in the past you have seen such absurdities as parallel Protestant and Catholic theology faculties in Germany and elsewhere. Even now there are many Church institutions (and Sangha institutions, etc.) which feel no call towards objectivity. Now maybe this is natu-

ral, and I am not complaining: I am only pointing out that the new tradition of religious studies really is *new*. This also by the way means that in a publicly funded university in a society with pluralist pretensions the modern form of religious studies is appropriate and older theological models simply are not, unless perhaps they provide for a pluralism of professional trainings (for Christians, for Jews, for Buddhists and so on).

Third, traditional religious reactions also apply to some secular or non-religious ideologies. In Marxist countries until lately there was little attempt to study any of the social sciences with openness or any attempt at objectivity. By having a theory of truth which subordinated it to economic and political considerations, Marxists were able to rule out fairness and openness as bourgeois manifestations (though it is worth saying that because of the strategic placement of the bourgeoisie and the importance of professional training and development, the great figures in the pursuit of truth, both in the arts and in the social sciences and the like, have been bourgeois, including of course Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky). Now I am not ruling out some kind of ideology which is Marxist, but it can only establish its plausibility openly, in other words take on board the methods of informed empathy and the like which have this liberal air.

But this gets back to our paradox as creatures: it suggests that our reflective capacities will canalise our direction within our immersion in events. In short, reflection will dictate a kind of liberalism. And what kind of real openness is this? You can believe what you like as long as you are a liberal! But I think we have to make certain distinctions, to see how my ideal of the descriptive study of religion (and theorising about it), or worldview analysis, relates to pluralism.

First, intellectual openness does imply freedom from State or other interference. No doubt some delicate compromises have to be affected: often funding will come from the State or from large corporations, and such sources will have an effect on bending researches. But still, it is possible in a plural society to maintain intellectual divergences and critical attitudes. We call this the 'hundred flowers' principle. But this in no way implies that none of the flowers are Jewish or Catholic or Buddhist. The very nature of human beings and the softness of criteria for determining worldviews' truth will no doubt ensure diversity, without anyone being forced away from such plural expression.

Second, intellectual openness does require other kinds: thus, it implies that differing positions on matters of value should, so far as possible, be allowed. This does not impose restrictions of any serious kinds on traditionalist practices, provided they are undertaken freely by individuals. For instance, if Muslim women want to use the veil, they should be able to do so, though it may turn out that in a modern society there should be protection for women forcibly subjected to male authority. It turns out that most social practices which a liberal society would wish to prevent are not even sanctioned by the original values of the religious traditions which uphold them.

There are those who interpret liberalism in a narrower sense, namely as a part of scientific humanism. Secularists of this ilk might wish to impose uniformity in education, so as to impose this and no other form of values on education in a school system. This I consider to be intolerant, and it reinforces my conviction that there is a sort of fundamentalist liberalism which does not really embrace any kind of pluralism.

Such fundamentalist liberalism or secularism is by the way fairly prevalent in universities. There is often, for instance, quite strong opposition to religious studies for fear that it might involve the presentation of Christian or other views. Now the charge in one sense can be justified in the sense that establishmentarian or other sleight of hand (in Britain) or denominational pressure (in the States) may often result in the pushing of programmes whose true intent is subtle proselytisation – consider for instance those Bible chairs in Texas, which are given some status within the State university. But the modern student of religion is in fact as much resistant to religious pressures as a humanist would be. The problem of prejudice and the selling of worldviews within a university system is not confined to religious worldviews. Occasionally you find social science departments dominated by Marxists. Within the wider structure of an open university this may not be a problem, but it can lead to a regrettable homogeneity of opinion. I would wish to distinguish the pluralistic liberalism implied by the 'hundred flowers' principle from the restrictive fundamentalist humanism which wishes to impose homogeneity in its own way.

The hundred flowers principle cannot be confined to intellectual matters. If minorities wish to adopt deviant lifestyles then they should be allowed to do so. It is true that in a modern

society there have to be some general rules for technical reasons. You cannot have one set of driving regulations for Jews and another for Christians. But so far as possible divergent ways of living should not merely be tolerated but even encouraged.

We earlier examined briefly the ways in which different countries modernised and strengthened themselves against the rampage of colonialism. India preserved a huge part of its tradition; Japan retained quite a lot; China, through Mao Zedong thought, very little. This I believe has involved China in tremendous losses. Naturally, no tradition can continue to exist without modification. Confucianism today outside of China is undergoing something of a revival, but in modernised form. All the religions, as we have indicated, have undergone some sort of synthesis with modern cultural values. Mainstream Christianity has merged with aspects of post-Enlightenment liberalism. The Hindu tradition has acquired some nationalist characteristics: and so on. But it is a tragedy for China that so much of its cultural and intellectual past has been submerged.

Now looked at from a neutral point of view we can perceive no absolute necessity either about the shape of traditions or about their modes of development. What would the Christian faith have been like if Paul and Plotinus had both died young? Or Augustine and Luther? There is a certain contingency about ongoing traditions. But their continuance has merit from a human point of view, rather like the survival of species. If we chop down most of the flowers, the hundred flowers principle will itself wither. So apart from anything else the great religious traditions are vantage points for the critique of modern society and help to supply an important variegation in human life. We can perceive them as longstanding experiments in living.

It is of course fortunate that the Western powers, together with certain Asian powers, notably India, were saved from the threats of totalitarian societies under Hitler and Stalin, and have prospered. The revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe are a remarkable opening up to the forces of pluralism. If the spread of liberalism continues it will greatly help the survival of the traditional religions. But there are countervailing tendencies which represent problems for pluralism. For one thing, every tradition is in reality several. One strand of each tradition can loosely be called 'fundamentalist', and is typically intolerant. I emphasise however the multiple character of the traditions – it is a mistake

to look upon the great religions as unitary. At any rate, the rightist manifestations of faiths – challenged by the luxurious ambience of freedom and austerely fond of some old patterns of faith – express a backlash against the liberal perspective.

This can be compounded by alliances between religion and nationalism. The nationalist urge, so powerful since 1789, is becoming obsolete, and yet it has many miles to go. It is obsolete because economic and technological facts mean that very often a national economy has to cooperate closely with others to manufacture certain items, such as aircraft; while the exchanges of the world are in virtually instantaneous communication and interactions; companies can easily migrate from one country to another; much of the economy is dominated by a few hundred transnational corporations; new international formations, such as the European Community, are being created; many products and operations are becoming globalised. And yet nationalism, as I have said, has many miles to go. This is because in many cases existing boundaries leave discontented minorities, and because many national identities are not recognised by independence. As for minorities: think of the Transylvanians in Romania; Turks in Bulgaria; Moldavians in the Soviet Union; Muslims in the Southern Philippines; the Karens and Shan in Burma; the Tibetans in China – and there are many others. There are hosts of ethnic units in Africa who may in the future want their own separate self-expression. Africa indeed is a power keg of national movements ready to explode – not immediately, but probably during the next few decades. All experience shows that without the most considerable devolution the dominant unit cannot contain the minority movement, if it is to avoid long guerrilla warfare. So as, at one end of the scale, nations are becoming obsolete, at the other they are a powerful ideal. There is nothing like deprivation of nationhood to stimulate nationalism, and nothing like suppression for keeping it alive.

But an emphasis on the struggle for national freedom does not augur well for individual freedom and the open society. Of their nature nationalist movements tend towards violence and military discipline, often underpinned by a rigorous ideology. We are, moreover, currently witnessing the revival of nationalisms in the former Soviet Union. It was one of the last two colonial empires in the world, the other being China. Both will break up eventually, almost inevitably. With a typical mixture of ignorance,

hypocrisy and idealism, humanity at large has not thought of the Soviet Union as a colonialist country, nor of China. But they act towards the Kirghiz and the Tibetans in a manner quite analogous to the way the French treated the Algerians or the British treated Burma. By cloaking imperialism under an ideology of anti-imperialism these countries have got away with it. Anyway, their days of colonial domination are beginning to fade. But sunset does not portend the shining of the moon of religious or individual freedom, for it will depend on the alignments of the successor nations.

The fragmentation of the whole land surface of the globe into compact territories occupied by sovereign states, and modelled in the identities (subjectively perceived) of nations is a vital fact of modern life. But at least there is some diminution of the older ballet in which nations waltzed round one another, ready to strike with the fangs of war. Modern economic necessities help to restrain fighting, and yet nations still spend fantastic sums on armaments, often to use against their own citizens.

It is a necessary evolution that nations should gain independence or some satisfactory form of federal devolution. And though we can envisage a time in the far future when nationhood will fade away, foreseeably nations will be with us. They will be a strong element in the maintaining of some degree of cultural pluralism. Indeed, with the growth of global systems of communication, they will be a check on homogenisation.

On the same principle that I have used in regard to the way different religions can provide mutual criticism and counterforces, so transnational organisations provide a counterweight to nations. First, there are the transnational corporations and the whole apparatus of global capitalism. For two reasons it can be favourable to pluralism (though it can also seduce governments into authoritarianism): first, workers and consumers are individual units, and their colour, religion, etc., do not matter; and second, the conception of the market is decentralist. Further, bourgeois ideals of liberalism were nurtured during the development of modern capitalism. The American experience moreover was important: after World War II the Marshall Plan in Europe and MacArthur's proconsulate in Japan both fostered liberal institutions.

So there is some advantage in having the world divided two ways – one way into a plethora of national units, and another

way through transnational institutions – above all capitalist ones, but also international societies, such as Amnesty and other agencies which can foster individual choice and the 'hundred flowers'.

Yet these very forces can hold out menaces. Often driven by technical and secular forces they threaten to impose homogeneity, while many international organisations are western in values and may inhibit diversity. Apart from this, the dispositions of transnational capitalism today are most unfavourable to poor nations. The Third World still groans under many deprivations and debts. No doubt the whole order needs restructuring. And we can already of course foresee that our present rate of extravagance in the use of raw materials and our improvidence regarding pollution threaten the whole planet. Again restructurings are called for.

So both the national ways things are organised and the cross-hatching international forces are mixed blessings. Nations can instal freedoms but also fascisms; transnational entities can breed both freedom and conformism, as well as economic injustice.

We may see our analysis so far as dealing with two layers: the layer of nation states on the one hand (still far from complete as to its final configuration) and the layer of international economics and transnational entities on the other. Their cross-hatching as I shall call it is important in creating a plural environment. There is a third layer, and that is the major worldviews of the world, especially the traditional religions. The nature of today's world is such that for all the variegation of subtraditions within these worldviews, each is also experiencing a transnational ecumenical movement. This third, spiritual, layer is important because it can bring a prophetic critique to the other forces of this world. Since religious worldviews have their roots so to speak in heaven or the transcendent, I shall call this the heavenly layer. Even Marxism promises heaven on earth, and though the nomenclature is perhaps not quite suitable to apply to scientific humanism, it will suffice to give an idea of my meaning. We then have three layers of our world: the national, the transnational and the heavenly. Of course there is also I guess our point of origin – as individuals, and so we might add at the beginning the *personal* layer. These four layers can easily be in conflict with one another. Persons can be critical of the policy of their nations;

nations can agitate against the workings of international capitalism; economic forces can undermine totalitarian States; heavenly worldviews can critique the operation of any or all of these layers. Indeed, I think this is a foremost duty.

For instance, time and time again Hong Kong people will say (no doubt with some secret pride) that they are pragmatic folk, and for this reason have created a highly dynamic economy. It is, I recognise, a singular achievement. Yet there is a short-term frenzy about such pragmatism. Do they listen enough to the heavenly layer? I do not know: but it is easy to feel that in the long term pragmatism by itself will not serve Hong Kong well. 4 June 1989 was not just about political power and national identity: it was also about heavenly values.

Since, of course, the Far East – the realm of China and Japan and other orbital countries – is itself a product, recently, of the meeting of East and West, both Buddhism and Christianity may assume specially important weight in the critique of the national and international orders. The old Marxist critique of the excesses of capitalism and the post-colonial world order has faded, because the Marxist heaven has faded. It no longer has the prophetic power or human appeal to serve as a base for the critique of our world institutions. This may give both these major religious traditions opportunities of supplying deeper correctives. Both easily merge with elements of liberal humanism. But they have some deep symbols to offer in the struggle for a new world order. There is for instance the Bodhisattva, unhappy till all are saved, and able to distribute his surplus merit to the otherwise unworthy faithful. Today's Bodhisattva would be deeply concerned about the appalling maldistribution of this world's goods as between nations. There are, in both traditions, guidances on meditation, deepening human self-awareness, and biting below the surfaces of life. Already Buddhist values have entered into economic debate through the writings of Schumacher. The questioning of present economic structures has been launched mainly through liberation theology.

Of course the cross-hatching of the four layers may not be enough to preserve the freedoms and the hundred flowers. There can be various menaces in the air because of technical advance. And what if we ever had a world government? Might that not become universally oppressive? The technical menaces I think of are as follows: the compilation of vast quantities of data about

individuals through computers, and the repressive use of those data; the great advance in possibilities of surveillance through spy satellites; the possibilities of brain implantations to control people through the long-distance infliction of pain; the creation of methods of obliterating computer programs through government-generated viruses; the invention of new techniques of subliminal influence through television; two-way TVs which can keep an eye on individuals; and so on. As our world shrinks and becomes crowded it will easily become a place of oppression.

The traditional religions, together with Chinese Christianity and Islam, will no doubt have a real role to play once again in China. The Yangtze will not forever flow red, and the Marxists of Beijing will not forever keep that great country under their control. It may take longer to crumble than parts of Eastern Europe. And when the huge giant awakes once more, it will see that it was quite unnecessary to erase its past. Confucius, Mencius and the other sages will glide back. Lao-tzu will reappear from out of the West. Buddhism will stir itself from beneath the rubble of pagodas. Christianity will regain its international life, and Islam will play an even more open role in parts of China. These stirrings will help the Chinese to a deeper and more cultivated life again. It will be a life suffused with older values once again, but learning something too from the egalitarianism of the Marxist ideal.

It may be argued that the whole picture I have drawn, of a pluralism of worldviews, is itself a worldview.[1] It is I think a higher-order position, arguing for the interplay of worldviews. It suggests that existing traditions and any new ones should settle differences by persuasion rather than force. It implies a certain kind of politics, of course – the strengthening of federal-type arrangements, the encouragement of minorities, the protection of individual freedom in religion, ideology, beliefs and so on. But it does, we hope, offer maximum compatible freedom to the diverse lifestyles. An Ayatollah Khomeini would not get everything he asked for. But he could get a lot – the observance of Shi'a Shari'a for the majority if they wished, provided no one was penalised for forsaking Islam or being a non-Muslim.

Probably in the future we need to evolve new political arrangements to protect different groups living together in the same country or big city: maybe a system of cantons. But, at any rate, the aims would be to allow diversity without forcing people to

stay with their traditions: something indeed rather like the Ottoman *millet* system.

As the world shrinks there will be much more interest in the reconstruction of the past. It is, so to speak, another place to go to. In this historical task worldview analysis is I believe profoundly important. However, warm objectivity is something easily attacked. Can we really be dispassionate? Are we not always bringing our cultural biases to bear in crosscultural analysis? Naturally we are heavily determined by our cultural background. But the question has no meaning unless we can detect bias. If we can detect it we can correct it. We may not be able to be completely objective, but we can improve, getting a bit nearer the goal. It is surely (apart from being a methodological imperative) a moral demand that we should respect our fellow humans by understanding them as well as possible. Here, by the way, Buddhism has something to offer on methodology. The aim of mindfulness is to be clear as possible about the workings of our own feelings and mental processes. You are supposed to be able to detect biases and distortions. We can use this too to help us in clarity in seeking to delineate the workings of other systems of belief and ways of life. We can of course also be helped by the criticism of others. I indeed always take criticism of my optimism about understanding and objectivity as ideals to strive for in a positive way. It is good to know about difficulties – and usually such criticisms do amount to little more than pointing to problems. But problems which are specified can for the most part be dealt with. If someone however adduces relativism or the incommensurability of cultures my feeling is: Why bother with theories which block even the possibility of research? They lead us nowhere. Philosophy is littered with corpses of impossibilities.

But while I consider that worldview analysis, as I have called it, demands the attempt of fairness, dispassion, imagination and objectivity, the cases of worldview construction and worldview criticism are different. It has been part of my argument that we are entering a new era of mutual criticism as between worldviews. This will no doubt lead to greater synthesis and eclecticism. These worldviews will not merge in the foreseeable future. But they will soften and hopefully enrich one another, if we can maintain the pluralism. In a sense we shall be building and rebuilding worldviews. Whether the human race will ever get to the stage of a single lower-order worldview is open to

The dream of world conversion is perhaps like those older dreams of world conquest that ended in Hitler's bunker in Berlin, or maybe nearby at the Wall when it was nibbled at and holed lately. I hope we retain our cussed and sincere differences a long time. We might of course agree on the higher-order worldview I sketched, I hope as soon as possible. But in proposing such a value I am not of course doing worldview analysis. I am stating, endorsing, urging a position. That is different from the task of the analyst or historian.

But there is an irony, which I have already alluded to. The irony delights me. It is this. The very attempt at objectivity, warm dispassion, mutual criticism and a methodology aimed at telling how things are, above all human things – in brief, the very attempt at a dispassionate worldview analysis demands a degree of liberalism in education and government that runs against the grain of hardline views and regimes. It goes against the grain of the Ayatollah Khomeini (though not against the grain of Hoseyn Nasr); it goes against the grain of Li Pang; it goes against the grain of authoritarians, even a little against the grain of Margaret Thatcher.

Anyway this naughty little irony is why I think that in the long run a pluralist victory is likely. Or, at least less unlikely than other outcomes. The trouble is that madnesses of nationalism may yet trigger nuclear catastrophe: the ghastly weapons will spread. The poverty of peoples might produce new Hitlers. The stock markets might collapse and cause misery for all. Civil war in the former USSR might end in a mushroom cloud. We walk on a thin line in this world. But if we walk far along that line I am optimistic that pluralism will prevail, and a liberal ethos. They are preconditions of the successful pursuit of truth. In other words, they are realistic.

But after such an outburst of optimism let us return briefly to the messages of Buddhism and Christianity. The Buddha and Christ were both keenly aware of suffering. Let us not forget. Curried prawns and Gucci shoes should not obscure the suffering of this life.

Appendix: The Western Meaning of Eastern Philosophies (The Second Louis Cha Lecture, 1989)

Some twenty-five years ago I published a book (happily going into a new revised edition) called *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*.[1] It had as one of its two major aims to render Indian arguments interesting and accessible to Westerners, and Western philosophy teachers in particular. The other aim was to illuminate the relation between many systems of thought in India to religious doctrine. To some extent the first aim represented an approach which at a deeper level is suspect. It was sifting another tradition for ideas which had a resonance with Western debates. It was imposing some Western categories on Eastern thought. But I thought it worth while, for the end was a good one – to interest Western philosophers in South Asian reflections. But at that deeper level to which I referred we should be much more radical, and recognise that both the South Asian and the East Asian traditions (very diverse themselves save for the bridge of Buddhism) do not correspond closely to recent canons of Western philosophy. To fit them into a straitjacket of recent foreign making does not do them a service. On the other hand, some phases of Western thought look much more like Indian or Chinese speculation and worldview-building. So even the Western model of philosophy may crumble in part. The fact is that much Western philosophy does not fit modern canons of philosophy either. If we loosen up our categories it will greatly enhance the task of comparative philosophy (or whatever we should call it). Let me make some preliminary observations before we get to my main argument.

First, what broadly may be called modern Western analytic philosophy, which often interestingly makes use of a telling phrase, namely the idea of a 'professional philosopher' (which suggests some wonderful pictures – say that of Socrates refusing to drink the hemlock at sunset on the ground that it was after

office hours), has its retrospective canon of philosophers and of philosophical writings. Such a canon imposed backwards is necessarily both selective and controversial. For notoriously philosophy has shifted its grounds, methods and scope from time to time. Each phase would have a different canon, even if there were overlaps. Some figures of obviously great impact in Western history are only disputatiously philosophers. Many courses have in recent times left out such figures as Plotinus, Giambattista Vico, the Cambridge Platonists, Marx, Nietzsche and even Heidegger. History was plundered for analytic insights, and the rest discarded, like throwing away the duck and eating only the skin. The view backwards from Ryle or Carnap was very different from the rearward vision of Hegel. Consequently, differing ages and ideals of philosophy create diverse canons.

Second, one may question whether 'philosophy' itself is the right word to use in conceiving a canon. We are mesmerised by it because the word itself is now embedded in institutions – above all in philosophy departments in universities, but also in international conferences, journals and institutes which use the name of philosophy. But the way universities are institutionalised (and I refer to the dominant Western model) is obviously open to criticism. The divisions between subjects (meaning essentially departments) are often irrational, or at least open to questioning. What is the rationale of the division between sociology and anthropology? Why should literature be divided by nations and languages? Why should logic be taught in philosophy rather than in mathematics? And so on. The fact that philosophy is given its institutional embodiment gives the idea power. But I am not altogether persuaded that we have the carve-up right. At any rate, it is worth wondering about the very category of philosophy. In short, both the canon and the category should be under critical scrutiny.

In passing I might say that the English language, not to mention other languages that I have contemplated in this regard, is singularly weak in its vocabulary for matters of belief, religion, values and so on. We must not assume that the right words are waiting for a more rational and open view of our subject-matter. So we have to do the best we can.

The proposal I wish to make is that it might be better for us to talk about two or three tasks that might otherwise be held to

come under such rubrics as 'worldview analysis', 'worldview building' and 'worldview critique'. I shall explain what I mean here as we go along. I am not altogether happy with the English word 'worldview'. It is probably better than 'Weltanschauung' which is awkward in English. Another possibility is to use the word 'philosophy' so that it can be used in the plural: hence my title – but it too has various disadvantages, which I need not go into at this moment. In brief, I want to argue that in approaching, from the West, Eastern philosophies we might look upon our task as some kind of worldview analysis, and after that perhaps some new worldview building resulting from and accompanied by worldview critique.

Let me begin my main task by contemplating rather briefly the Indian philosophical tradition (so-called). I shall then move on to China, the other great centre of worldview building in Asia. *En passant*, let me point out that the division of the world into East and West is itself of course somewhat irrational. There are various great centres of civilisation and culture, and they can be grouped in varying ways. To treat everything non-Western under one hat is a piece of Western hubris. The great London institution for the study of non-Western cultures, the School of Oriental and African Studies, is a sign both of hubris and illogicality: hubris in sticking the East together (not to mention the coupling with Africa), and illogicality in leaving outside so much – Oceania for instance. I have adopted the 'East–West' convention in my title; but I shall treat matters in a threefold, not in a binary, way. Even that of course is a simplification.

Let me now apply my argument to the Indian tradition. First, let me note that from a traditional Hindu viewpoint the systems of thought, such as Vedanta, Mimamsa, Sankhya and so on, have been classified as either *āstika* or *nāstika*, that is as either orthodox or unorthodox, depending on whether they recognise the authority of *śruti*, which we can loosely translate as 'revelation', referring that is to what Brahmanical Hindus look on as revelation. Consequently such systems as Lokayata (Materialism), the Buddhist schools and Jaina philosophy are seen as unorthodox. Occasionally Hindu philosophers in talking about Indian philosophy are really talking about Hindu thought; or they may at least be referring to the past in a way which makes Hindu thought dominant. Now, as I indicated in my opening

remarks, this does correspond to a certain thought, namely that the doctrines of Indian systems are indeed often closely linked to religion.

That such a link should occur elsewhere is indicated by our use of such terminology as 'Jewish philosophy' and 'Islamic philosophy' – and occasionally people use the phrase 'Christian philosophy'.

Now if we were just interested in the history and understanding of various systems of thought in the past, then we would of course be interested in how they present forms of belief which relate to some major themes in the civilisations in question. Thus the discussion of those philosophies which come under the head of Vedanta would involve much concern with how the same texts, such as the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtra* are used to sustain rather different systems. But we could not avoid dealing with religion. This would be natural from an Indian point of view, precisely because transcendental testimony is sometimes regarded as a source of knowledge or *pramāna*, together with inference and perception. And even where this is rejected, as in the case of Buddhism, there is an unmistakable connection between the systems propounded and the spiritual life.

This does not mean that there are not used arguments which are rational – or intended to be. We can appraise these arguments as well as describe them: we can exhibit the dialectic between the diverse schools. To this I shall return shortly.

But the aims of framing the different *darśanas* or viewpoints do not necessarily correspond to the purposes of doing philosophy today (at least from a Western perspective). Moreover, in earlier India the diverse experts trained in the differing schools did not think of themselves as belonging precisely to a single philosophical profession: they rather belonged to differing school-lineages.

Just to add to the complication, some systems are presented in ways that at first puzzle us when we note the supposed connection with salvation. Thus the Vaiśeṣika school has a complex account of how the world is made up of imperishable atoms, of how they stick together to make up continua, and so on. Ultimately as it turns out they need a Lord or *īśvara* (God) to keep the system together. Much of the discussion seems like protoscience. But that of course is not how philosophy is understood today in the West.

Anyway, it seems to me that the schemes of thought which you have in the Indian tradition are virtually all whole, and occasionally partial, worldviews. They sketch the nature of reality and in some degree indicate how we should react to that reality. There is moreover no clear line between those worldviews which are presented formally and rather rationally and those which are simply set forth as viewpoints in need of acceptance. Broadly speaking we have the presentation of worldviews and then, in order to defend them against rival viewpoints, various commentaries upon them. Argumentation tends to be commentarial, though of course such commentary often helps to define the worldview (this is especially true of Vedanta, where as we have seen a number of differing worldviews are educed from the same tradition). It seems to me therefore that a better way of looking at the history of Indian thought (or more broadly South Asian thought) is as a history and analysis of the various worldviews, and their mutual relations. The descriptive task of understanding them is best described in my view as *worldview analysis*. This is sufficiently new and placid a phrase for us not to be plagued by classifying schemes as religious or not, or philosophical or not.

Now of course a modern person may not be just – or at all – interested in the history and analysis of past systems. Or she may be interested in adapting tradition to the present world. Thus for instance at the end of the 19th Century Swami Vivekananda gave a reformulation, mainly through the medium of English, of the 8th Century system known as Advaita Vedanta. It was a tour de force: modern neo-Advaita became the dominant expression of a modern Hindu ideology, and it played a notable role in the nationalist movement and in the framing of the constitution of the Republic of India. Such an activity might be described not as worldview analysis but as *worldview construction*. Many contemporary philosophers and Christian and other theologians are engaged on this task – such people as Karl Popper, Quine, Hans Küng and Gustavo Gutierrez, to name a few Westerners. Such worldview building may be rather partial: trying to formulate a new theory of consciousness, or of the class struggle, or of the will. But in principle these piecemeal searches are part of the more general process of worldview building.

It is an interesting question as to how, once the activity is passed, it becomes history. It is like a tractor making tread-tracks across a muddy field. The tractor makes them, but when

they are made they are subjects of scrutiny and analysis. You do not understand them by driving the tractor over them again. Of course, heuristically there is sometimes indeed merit in interrogating the past as you would a present person, but I shall come to the question of what I call *worldview critique* shortly.

To analyse a worldview historically and well you should delineate it as it was, with its 'then' meanings and 'then' contexts. To build a good worldview you need to construct an effective one for whatever reason, e.g. its persuasiveness through argument, symbolic force, ethical appeal or whatever. It may be noted that those who, like Küng or Vivekananda, are reshaping something given from tradition are building, but perhaps it could be more clearly called *reconstructing*. So we have made a distinction between worldview analysis on the one hand and worldview construction or reconstruction on the other hand.

Now of course we may be interested in *evaluating* worldviews as well as analysing them. In particular we may be concerned with the arguments that are used. A couple of notable cases in the Indian tradition relate to whether theories of causation contain contradictions, and debates regarding the existence of a Creator. In relation to the former is Nāgārjuna's famous critique of the major theories of causation in the tradition: thus, if causes are different from effects and occur at a different time do the former not cease to exist by the time the latter come into existence, and does this not involve a contradictory thought, namely that a non-existent cause can have an existent effect? As to the latter issue, Rāmānuja's comprehensive critique of the Indian version of the teleological argument includes the reflection that the more powerful the argument is, the nearer God is to a human agent, but this is undesirably anthropomorphic. The less anthropomorphic God is the weaker the argument. Well, all such arguments are of some interest, and we may try to evaluate their soundness; and to decide whether such a worldview contains contradictions, and so on. Such *worldview critique* differs from history or analysis as such, though sometimes interrogation of older systems may help us to understand from a critical point of view why certain developments occur. But we may still rightly distinguish between historical, analytic treatments and critical comments. One of the most distorting ways of writing history is to feed into past systems assumptions that belong to our own time. The sharp distinction between worldview analysis and worldview construc-

tion or critique is necessary to establish true understanding. It is something of vital importance which has begun to flourish within anthropology and religious studies particularly. Thus Benjamin Schwarz wrote in his *The World of Thought in Ancient China*:

> However much we may be repelled or attracted by various ideologies, [Geertz] contends, a 'dispassionate' study of ideologies must not be based on a frenetic effort to reduce them to their presumed psychological or sociological causes. On the contrary we must first take seriously the degree to which adherents *believe in* the truth of the symbolic systems to which they adhere and even the degree to which this belief may shape their behavior. There is nothing 'tender-minded' in the view that the Nazi's conscious belief about Jews may have decisively determined their behavior.[2]

All this stems from Weber, Collingwood and Dilthey: and I have tried to express it in a clear form concerning the task of the comparative study of religions in my *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*.[3] To those who are impatient to get to the question: But is such and such a worldview *true*, I say two things. First, are we trying to do history or not? And: Wait – for when we understand it then we can evaluate it.

I now turn to survey something of the Chinese intellectual tradition. Here the point I made about school-lineages applies just as strongly, though in a different social context. The three 'religions' of China in effect evolved their own lineages and of course their own canons. Moreover, there are some texts which simply *present* partial or whole worldviews. This is obvious with the *Tao-teh ching*, which simply presents a mysterious perspective on the world. It does not much argue for its position. By the tests of modern Western technical philosophy it is scarcely a philosophical work at all. And though the *Analects* has a dialogical cast, it is very much from on high: the sage speaks. The same in principle is true of much later works, such as those of Chu Hsi. Two of the greatest of Chinese Buddhist intellectual creations, namely Ch'ān Buddhism and the Hua-yen are not at all without rational basis, of course, but they are presented as worldviews which presumably have appeal, but have strong traditional input. (Of course, some may wonder whether Ch'ān should count as a worldview because it destroys all worldviews – except that

the destruction comes at the end of a tunnel, which has a Buddhist shape.)

Now we can if we like do what I did in part in my *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*. In the 'argument' part I looked for parallels to Western discussions, in the hope of attracting modern Western philosophers to South Asian philosophy. A somewhat similar tactic is used in an important recent collection, edited by Dr Robert E. Allinson of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, by Antonio S. Cua in an article on *li* (*Understanding the Chinese Mind – the Philosophical Roots*)[4]. By approaching Hsun-tzu from the direction of Hampshire and Austin, he gives Western-trained philosophers an insight into a Chinese worldview – though really he is involved at least in part in what I have called *worldview critique*. This however is a good tactic. But more profound I think is the contribution to the same volume by Kuang-ming Wu, who, as Robert Allinson says in his introductory chapter, is involved in Signifying the Western mind – expanding notions of aesthetics. But such a process is a form of what I have called *worldview construction*. This might be another way of getting Westerners to take seriously the Chinese mind.

However, I would argue that the chief contribution of Western thought is not to do with the philosophical questions which can be posed of the East, or of the syncretisms that are now becoming possible, but in the ideal of warm dispassion, the entering into other cultures, the deep attempt at worldview analysis. If that is our ideal it does not matter too much what our tactics may be.

Now I want to move to two final points. One concerns the idea of philosophy again. The other concerns new forms of worldview construction opened up for the future.

As Dr Lao Sze-kwang notes in his contribution to the same volume (p. 265) there is no word in Chinese for philosophy until modern times, when *zhexue* (*che-hsüeh*), came to be used – a Japanese coinage first used in the 1900s at the Capital University in Peking. Likewise there is no precise equivalent in Sanskrit or Pali, traditionally. Already to use a Westernised term is to impose a modern grid. It is like saying that the Buddha's birth place is in Nepal: in those days there was no Nepal. My 'worldview' does correspond to the Sanskrit *darśana* at least. I would conclude with recommending my multiple nomenclature as an alternative way of speaking.

Second, as we enter a period of global civilisation there is no

doubt that we shall be involved in a degree of syncretism and eclecticism. There is no reason why not: we might wish to build a worldview making use of materials from different civilisations. A modernised version of *li* for instance is highly useful as an ingredient in the mutual treatment of human beings. Some conceptions from Ramanuja can usefully come into a restatement of the God–world relationship in the Christian context. It may be that new forms of environmental values can be made making use of the concept of *tao*. So there is the task of a kind of multiple and crosscultural worldview construction. This task of course lies beyond that of simply understanding one another.

But that should not displace our need to rediscover our histories. We are really just at the beginning of a world strategy to see into the histories of the different intellectual traditions out of which we have partly grown. In recovering our ancestries we need the right models for exploration, though in a universal language. I think that my proposal about worldview analysis is important here, so we do not distort the past before we make use of it.

Notes

1 Diverse Worldviews in Today's World

1. I have advanced the same argument in *Worldviews*, ch. 1 and in *Religion and the Western Mind*.
2. As in Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* and John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*.
3. R.C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times*.
4. W.C. Smith, *Religious Diversity*.
5. 'On Knowing What is Uncertain', in Leroy Rouner (ed.), *Knowing Religiously*.

2 Contrasts and Comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity

1. Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.
2. For a general discussion see M.M.J. Marasinghe, *Gods in Early Buddhism* and Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Concept of God*.
3. See Hossein Nasr, 'René Guenon', in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 6, 136–8.
4. *Sufi Essays*.

3 Buddhism in the Context of Chinese Religion and Philosophy

1. See Kenneth Ch'en's classical *Buddhism in China* and *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*; also Erick Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 2 vols.
2. Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsüeh*; Wing-tsit Chan, ed., *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*.
3. William Theodore de Bary and others, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 457.
4. Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 654–91.
5. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (eds), *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*.
6. See the analysis in my *Mao*.

4 Meditation in the Two Traditions – Nirvana versus God

1. Leon K. Hurwitz, *Chih-i (538–597)*.
2. *Mahānidāna Suttanta*, 35–36.
3. *Theophanies*, PG cl. 937a, quoted by V. Lossky in *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 37.
4. *Enneads* VI, ix, 3.
5. *Theodoki*, xxxi, pp. 206–7.
6. *Homily on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple*, ed. Sophocles, pp. 175–7.
7. See Robert Zeuschner's fine article on 'Awakening in Northern Ch'ān' in

David W. Chappell (ed.), *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society.*

8. Michael Pye (ed.), *Comparative Religion.*

5 Hua-yen Buddhism and Modern Japanese Thought

1. Goethe, *Poems.*
2. *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 2, sec. 18.
3. Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism*, p. 24.
4. *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, ch. iv.
5. *The Message of the Buddha* and *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.*

6 New Christian Interpretations: Science, Liberalism and Religion

1. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton.*
2. William Johnson, *The Search for Transcendence.*
3. Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism.*
4. William Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians.*
5. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith.*
6. For example, Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian.*
7. See Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine, *A Christian Systematic Theology in World Context.*

7 Continuities and Discontinuities between Mao Zedong Thought and the Traditional Religions of China

1. 'Discontinuities and Continuities between Mao Zedong Thought and the Traditional Religions of China', *Dialogue and Alliance*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 42–50; and Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, pp. 382–4.

8 Buddhism and Christianity: Complementarity?

1. Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics* and John Cobb and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology.*
2. John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism.*
3. Lynn de Silva, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity.*
4. Leslie Paul, *Nature into History.*
5. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* and *Death and Eternal Life.*

9 Buddhism, Christianity and Other Religions

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* and *Eastern Religions and Western Thought.*

10 Towards a Higher-Order Agreement on Worldviews

1. 'The Epistemology of Pluralism: The Basis of Liberal Philosophy', *Philosophy and Social Action*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 5–14.

Appendix: The Western Meaning of Eastern Philosophies

1. This is coming out in a new edition with Brill (1991): I am also working on a major work called *The World's Philosophies* designed to give a global perspective on systems of thought.
2. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 7.
3. *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*.
4. Robert E. Allinson (ed.), *Understanding the Chinese Mind – the Philosophical Roots*, pp. 209–235.

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Index

This book examines the relations between Buddhism and Christianity in the context of our emerging world civilization. It illuminates in particular the way Theravada Buddhism does not fit prevalent theories about religion and does not match Christian (or Muslim or Jewish or Hindu) belief in God. The assumptions of the two faiths are very different indeed. How then can we conceive them as relating?

The discussion draws upon Chinese and other Far Eastern developments, and on views about religions and modernity. There are interesting parallels, for instance, between Hua-yen philosophy and contemporary physics. The general conclusion is that a theory of complementarity can aid us in working out a view of the relations between the faiths that stresses the importance of friendly criticism. Perhaps God put diverse noble traditions in the world to keep one another honest?

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University of Hawaii Press
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Printed in Hong Kong